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#24

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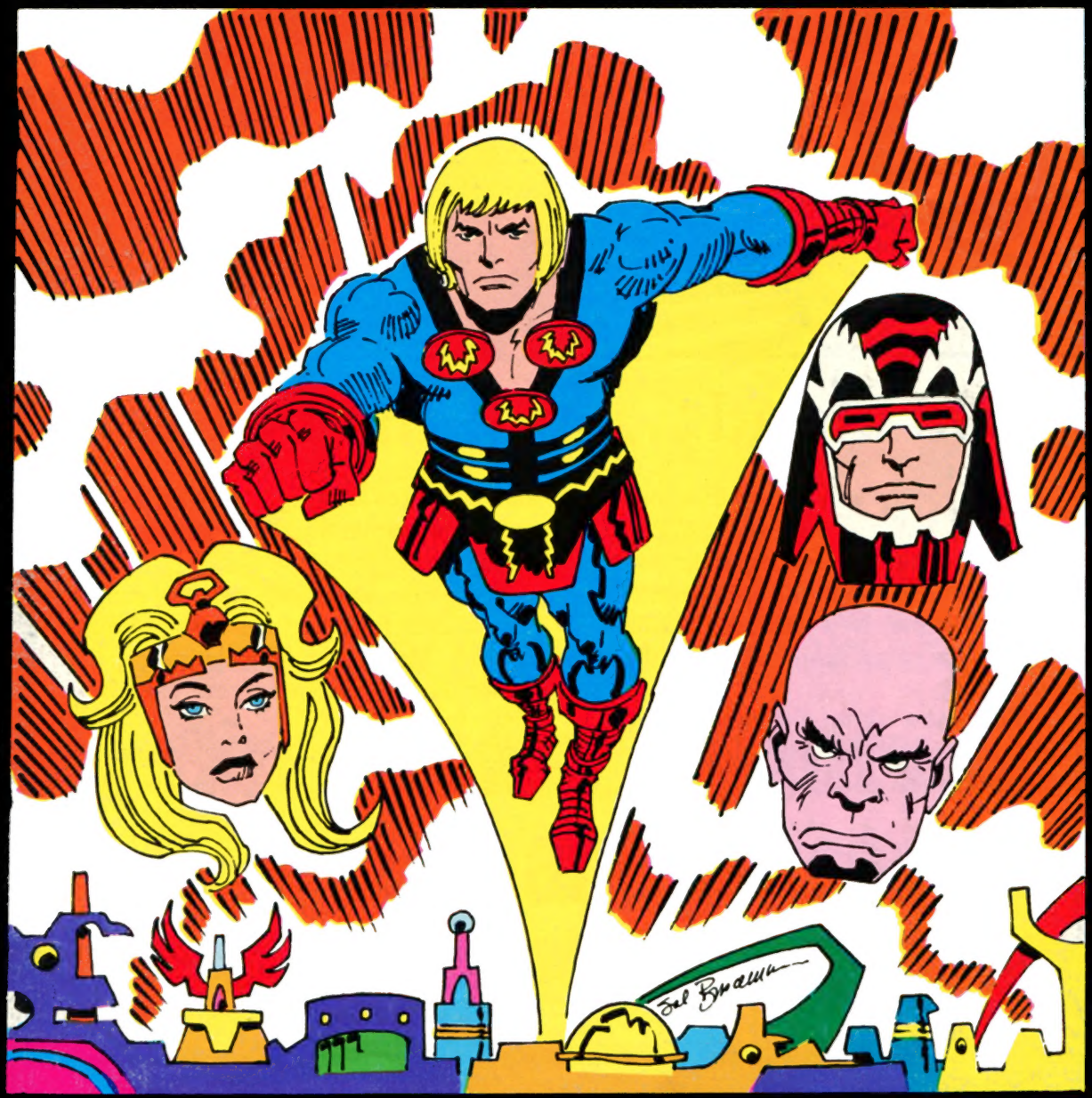

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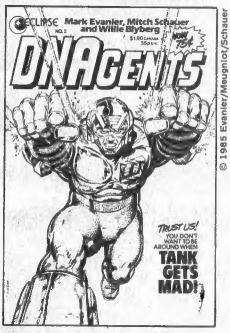

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UP FRONT

THIS MAGAZINE MAY BE WORTH $100.

Not a dream!
Not an imaginary story!
Not a hoax!

One day, this very magazine may well be worth $100. It may seem too unlikely to be true -- but if you could travel back in time and tell a person buying any one of a number of comics off the newsstand at 10¢ each that some of them would one day be worth thousands of dollars...wouldn't the idea seem equally unlikely, if not outright impossible?

Just what makes a collector's item? For one thing, a self-proclaimed fancy banner stuck on the cover does not a collector's item make. Two qualities alone are required, and can't be faked: Value -- and scarcity.

Certain old comics are worth a lot because they contain something many fans value -- the first appearance of a character or exceptional artwork -- and there are very few copies left to go around (so the price goes up). If everyone knew that ACTION COMICS featuring Superman's first appearance was going to be worth big bucks and stockpiled thousands of copies...it would be worth peanuts today.

It's not the popular comics of today, with print runs of a quarter to a half million copies that everyone is carefully preserving in plastic bags which will be tomorrow's collector's items. I believe folks today may be surprised to find that, in the future, magazines such as COMICS INTERVIEW stand a far better chance of becoming the truly sought-after and valuable collector's items.

-Dave

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL:
UP FRONT
a rap with *dak*
5

WRITER & ARTIST:
MAX COLLINS & TERRY BEATTY
dialog detective *peter gillis* unlocks the mystery of *ms. tree*
7

ARTIST:
SAL BUSCEMA
marvel's most unknown megastar opens up to *brian talley* about the early days and more
24

EDITOR:
KAREN BERGER
the muck stops here — a sweet talk with the overseer of *swamp thing*, *amethyst* and other dc comics
40

T-SHIRT TITAN:
BOB CHAPMAN
the guru of graphitti studios speaks with *ken jones*
63

FAN INCOGNITO:
T. M. MAPLE
canada's comics correspondence king converses with *gary mugford*
69

LETTERS:
THE LAST WORD
the readers carry on 'til all hours...
77

Announcing
the JOHN BYRNE Lithograph Series —
A MAJOR COMIC ART EVENT

Marvel's premiere artist, John Byrne, has recently completed a set of six pen and ink illustrations to be offered exclusively as fine art lithographs by Gary Peters Galleries. These are highly limited editions—there will only be five hundred copies of each—and are sure to sell out rapidly due to the high demand expected and the incredible low price of each lithograph.

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These lithographs offer everything you've come to admire about the unique Byrne style and something more. Free of the Comics Code censors, John has let his imagination run wild and has created a dazzling array of new fantasy characters—all of them women. Like his famed interpretations of Dark Phoenix, Kitty Pryde, the White Queen, and even the super-strong, yet sensuous She-Hulk, these new characters are unbelievably breath-taking. But, because of the tastefully handled nudity present in these lithographs, we must limit the sale to collectors over eighteen years of age.

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"We are committed to MS. TREE."

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VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Max Allan Collins.
Occupation: Writer.
Born: 3 March 1948.
Residence: Muscatine, Iowa
Credits: Sixteen suspense novels including NOLAN, QUARRY, MALLORY, and NATHAN HELLER series. Co-author of ONE LONELY KNIGHT (with James L. Traylor) a critically biographical study of Mickey Spillane. Numerous magazine articles, short stories, reviews and criticism DICK TRACY comic strip, 1977 to date, MIKE MIST and MS. TREE. Also musician — various recordings.
Favorite Authors: Mickey Spillane, James M. Cain, Jim Thompson, Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammet, Donald E. Westlake, Mark Harris, William March, Willard Motley, Calder Willingham, Horace McCoy, and Ennis Willie.
Disparate Influences: Bobby Darin, Jack Webb, Leo Gorcey, and Shemp Howard

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Terry Beatty.
Occupation: Cartoonist.
Born: 11 January 1958.
Residence: Muscatine, Iowa.

Credits: MS. TREE, THE P.I.s, MOD, MIKE MIST, DR. WIRTHAM'S COMICS AND STORIES, PURE ENTERTAINMENT, JUST IMAGINE, THE COMICS PAGE, THE COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE, COMICS COLLECTOR, THE RECORD SPINNER and various book covers, album jackets and magazine illustrations.

Favorite Artists and Cartoonists: Herge, Lynd Ward, Peter Arno, Will Eisner, Ed Robbins, Johnny Craig, Steve Ditko, Wally Wood, Rockwell Kent, Bill Griffith, Bill Everett, Chester Gould and too many others to list.

Disparate Influences: Elvis Costello, Brian De Palma, Eddie Cantor and Pee Wee Herman.

MAX COLLINS & TERRY BEATTY

"MS. TREE is anything but cultish. We have

PETER B. GILLIS: *I guess I should start by asking you folks, what you started collaborating on — what your first project was together. It was a newspaper strip, wasn't it?*

TERRY BEATTY: Yeah. Actually our first collaboration together was on samples for the new version of the ANNIE newspaper strip, which was a job that we had for about two weeks, until apparently **Leonard Starr's** samples came in and they decided at the TRIBUNE SYNDICATE to go with Leonard.

And bouncing back from that disappointment, we put together a package of a weekly self-syndicated page of comics that we did for about a year — a well-balanced page of comics, with a mystery feature that was MIKE MIST and some funny comics and some panel features — and eventually it turned out that we were better creators than we were businessmen, and kind of let it go. But it led to having the MIKE MIST collection published by Eclipse. And then **Dean Mullaney** at Eclipse asking us to create another feature for him, which was MS. TREE. And the rest is history.

MAX COLLINS: One of the things about the MIKE MIST strip is that it seems that it is something that can't be killed with a stick. The CHICAGO READER, which is a half-million circulation newspaper something along the lines of the VILLAGE VOICE, I would say, picked up the comics page feature from us midway in the run. And they bought a full-page tabloid of comics to publish nothing but MIKE MIST. They simply wanted MIKE MIST and they paid the full rate. They really became our major paper in terms of circulation. And when we folded the comics at the year point, we then recycled, since they hadn't seen them, the first six months of MIKE MIST so that we had a full year's run there. And the high profile of MIST there really had to do with the Eclipse MISTcollection happening and with MYSTERY MAGAZINE — which was a national mystery publication that lasted, I think, about six or eight issues — coming to us and asking us to do MIKE MIST there. We were in about three issues of MYSTERY.

SO PERHAPS OUR STORY REALLY BEGINS DURING HAPPIER TIMES — LAST MONTH, AT WARBUCKS MANSION...
DON'T KNOW 'BOUT YOU, SANDY, BUT I'M BORED...
Beatty and Collins

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Right about that point, when MYSTERY folded, is when MS. TREE came along as a comic book. So MIST has gone into that book as the back-up feature. There is even now a two minute pilot cartoon based on MIKE MIST with the marketing headed for the cable services. It is a pilot, so who knows if anything will come of it? It is kind of ironic for me, having been a mystery writer now for ten or twelve years, that the first property of mine that actually goes to film is this silly trivial throwaway feature called MIKE MIST. Terry and I sometimes jokingly say that if we do make a fortune, God's ironic sense of humor being what it is, it will probably be from MIKE MIST.

We have been even, occasionally, using him in a more major way. He was on stage throughout the entire issue #9 of MS.TREE. He co-stars with her in the four-page three-D story, in the A-V 3-D SAMPLER. We've got another crossover planned. He even appears in the P.I.s, which wasn't even my idea — it was **Mike Gold's** insistence, that we use MIST.

PETER: *Well, since I read the CHICAGO READER, that was my first exposure to you two working together.*

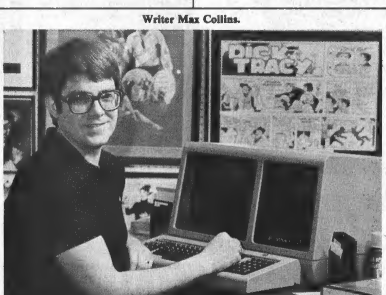
MAX: So you know about the bad puns, then. The dog-trader whose name was O'Bie D'ance. Terry was just as sick to his stomach when I first told him about it.

PETER: *Yow!*

MAX: "Yow," I think, is the correct response.

TERRY: It is amazing that **Collins** is still alive after handing me that particular script. *(Laughter.)*

Writer Max Collins.



potential even the most popular superhero doesn't."

PETER: *But, of course, Terry, you've also done some stuff on your own. The most recent thing that I've seen of yours is an independent project — the TALES MUTATED FOR THE MOD book.*

TERRY: That goes back to about 1980. I've also done short pieces for like DR. WIRTHAM'S COMICS AND STORIES, PURE ENTERTAINMENT, JUST IMAGINE, and there is a side of me that likes to do funny, crazy cartoon stuff in the KURTZMAN-ELDER comic-book mold. Not that I'm putting myself on their level — but coming from that school of cartooning.

MAX: Terry, tell him about the trade paperback best-seller that you have right now that you don't like to talk about.

TERRY: What I don't like to talk about is a book called — you can edit out **Hilary Barta's** laugh, he gave us permission to do so — OVERWORKED AND UNDERPAID by **Mary Bridget Carroll** that is something of a how-to book for secretaries, how to climb the corporate ladder, that I illustrated with little cartoon strips.

MAX: It is a major publisher, I believe, isn't it by Ballantine? Or is it Fawcett? Or is that the same thing?

TERRY: I could have told you, if you hadn't just said that. It is Fawcett.

MAX: You did the cover. This is his book.

TERRY: I did the cover and the interior illustrations. It seems to be in every bookstore that I go into. It's kind of amazing.

MAX: And Terry cut kind of a shrewd deal — he took a flat fee. *(Laughter.)*

TERRY: I have no percentage of the book whatsoever. So, boy, am I raking it in.

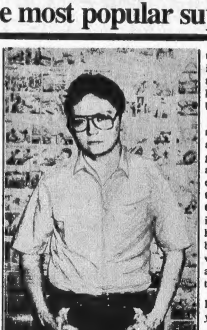
MAX: I told him when his paperback was in the windows in Chicago in all the Kroch stores stacked to the ceiling — he sort of wept and laughed simultaneously about the royalties that he wasn't getting. Because it is a paperback bestseller. I've never had a book in Kroch's window. I've had a book or two that was a crock, but... that's a different story.

PETER: *Speaking of cheap ironies...*

MAX: How come when my name comes up, you feel you have to speak of cheap ironies? Come on!

PETER: *Your name hasn't come up yet, actually. Should I call you Max or Al? Which do you prefer?*

MAX or AL: It doesn't really matter. I will try to quickly tell the story, which I guess everyone has heard — or are probably sick of hearing, I should say, and that is that I



Artist Terry Beatty.

am a junior. I am **Max Allan Collins, Jr.** I was raised as Allan and Al. It wasn't until I started publishing books that the Max started to be used. It wasn't my idea. When I signed the contract for my first book, the editor saw that my actual first name was Max, and said, "Hmmm, *that* sounds like a mystery writer." And that went on the books, without my even knowing about it. So I became the first person in history whose real name is his pseudonym, okay? Consequently a lot of people in the business, both the mystery-book business and the comics business, have met me as Max, and I have become quite used to being called Max. I used to blink when I was called Max. Now I don't. It's the same way when people I have known for years suddenly call me Al, and when those different people get together, we all sort of switch to *hey you.*

TERRY: This means that at conventions, I have to call him **Collins** all the time, or else *I* have to tell the story that he just told.

MAX: And the awkward thing for me is that I have to try to remember, like when I have a phone call from somebody, I have to remember if they know me as Max or Al. And that is one of the reasons that I added to — now it isn't on MS. TREE or TRACY — but on my novels, I have expanded the byline to include the middle name. So it is not to add pomp and circumstance, but to gradually work my own real name, which happens to be my middle name, into the byline

Also, there is a mystery writer by the name of **Michael Collins** who has been around longer than I have and we were beginning to have problems in reference works and bibliographies when the name was shortened to **M. Collins**, there became confusion, there being two mystery writers, named **M. Collins**. So now it is **M. A. Collins** which is me, and **M. Collins** which is him. This has been a big concern of mine, because we both had books out called THE SLASHER within a period of about two years. So there are listings that confuse the two books, and the two authors.

PETER: *Well, maybe if this gets into print, you won't have to tell the story anymore.*

TERRY: I hope that *I* don't have to. It's not even my name. Why do I have to tell the story?

MAX: And then there is the story of how Terry's real name is **Robert Johnson.** *(Laughter.)* We don't even want to get into that.

PETER: *Famous heroes of the blues, eh? Al Collins and Robert Johnson.*

TERRY: Just call me Bob.

MAX: That's **Al "Jazzbo" Collins**, thank you.

PETER: *One of the things that I have found interesting is the fact that, with all due cynicism, you are a top-flight writer, Terry is an illustrator, and that you are doing one comic book, one book only. Do you have any desire to do more?*

TERRY: We have done more in the sense that we have done THE P.I.s, although that is something of a MS. TREE spin-off. She is the co-star. We are committed to MS. TREE, she takes up the vast majority of my time. I barely have time to eat. With a property as good as MS. TREE I don't want to do much else. Occasionally, I like to do a little humor piece or a piece of commercial art, to keep my hand in something different.

MAX: And then there is the writing that you do.

TERRY: And there is the writing. I do some work for COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE and COMICS COLLECTOR, which I really enjoy doing and wish that I had more time to do. But at the moment, I don't have any

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"It's obviously more feasible to do MS. TREE live-action than SECRET WARS."

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desire to do any super-hero books or science-fiction books or anything else in that *genre*. That doesn't mean that someday I won't say, "Gee, I'd like to do that."

MAX: There is a big time constraint on both our parts. I have a very active part in mystery writing. My average has been a couple of books a year now, for several years. And the books that I am doing, that are historical novels set in Chicago about my Heller character are massive works. The manuscripts run in the 500-600 page area. The research involved is back-breaking. I do have help, sometimes from **Mike Gold** — who some people might have heard of — and another guy named **George Hagenaur**, who's been very active in fandom in Chicago and who has really been my savior as far as doing this research is concerned. My mystery writing is a fulltime job.

And then doing the DICK TRACY strip is another fulltime job, and then doing MS. TREE is another fulltime job. And I think that three fulltime jobs is quite enough. We really are dedicated to the property. We know that we are bucking the tide as far as the direct-sales market is concerned. We know we're doomed to be something of a cult book in this market. In larger terms, in real life terms, MS. TREE is anything but cultish in concept or in nature. We have a potential that probably even the most popular super-hero book doesn't have. We are talking in terms of such major spin-offs as motion pictures or television. It is just obviously more feasible to do MS. TREE live action than a SECRET WARS movie. Obviously, MS. TREE is the kind of story that would lend itself to that kind of adaptation, and could gain popularity out amongst the non-comics fans, because the non-comics fans don't want anything much to do with super-heroes.

So that one aspect of the character, even though it is limited in its initial market, makes it worth expending effort and gambling our time on. And that is why when we do branch out, it tends to be in spin-offs, like THE P.I.s, like the MUNDEN'S BAR STORY — which features MS. TREE. We are also planning to do a 3-D MS. TREE comic book. I hope that we will be doing some graphic novels, possibly with First, crossing over with some other characters. In fact, a very major talent with a very major character at First has made strong overtures about doing a crossover.

We take a kind of syndicated strip approach to this. We really view MS. TREE...

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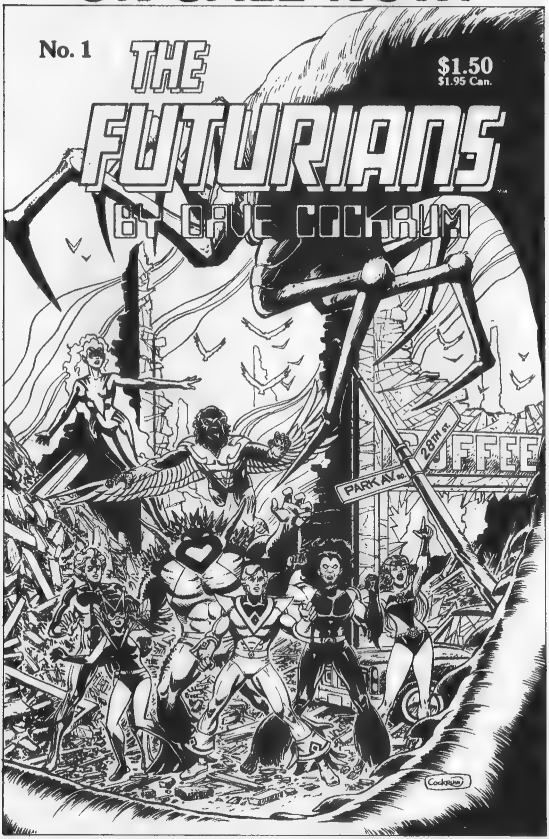
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"A bad editor can really muck it up."

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TERRY: . . .as the work that we do.

MAX: Very few people notice this, but we sign the strip like you would sign a comic strip. We do not break down the art credit. It says, "by **Collins and Beatty**."

PETER: *We have just had a statement from our audience of one, saying that he wishes that as many people were reading MS. TREE as were reading the SECRET WARS. Max had a really good comment that he probably doesn't want to see in print.*

MAX: I just pointed out that the collective I.Q of the readerships is the same.

PETER: *Very good.* (Laughter.)

MAX: Let me finish this one point and then toss the ball to Terry. We do approach the collaboration as very similiar to a comic strip, the classic kind of **Siegel and Shuster** collaboration. The way it works is that there is really, a lot of back and forth, Terry, maybe you could describe just how that works. . .

TERRY: It isn't really as simple as him writing the script and me drawing the pictures. MS. TREE is our baby and we talk about what is going to happen to her and discuss her life, and if Max has anything planned for her that doesn't quite sound right to me, I'll let him know, although that's never happened yet.

MAX: Not yet.

TERRY: And Max has quite a bit of influence on what the artwork looks like. He writes a very full script and that controls a lot of the storytelling. We have decided on a rather traditional format for the page layouts and the storytelling of the work. So just to say that the story is by Max and the artwork is by me, is an unfair breakdown. And also there is a third guy who isn't here, who is off in Hawaii, whose name is **Gary Kato**, who works on the artwork in a manner which is very much like an assistant who works on a newspaper strip. There really isn't a category for what he does in the regular comic-book breakdown of jobs.

MAX: But is very common in syndicated strips.

TERRY: He works on background and lettering and he will fill in on pencils, if I am behind schedule. And I don't know which credit you would give him, if you gave him a little credit in the Marvel credit box. In a newspaper, you'd just be an assistant, and you wouldn't get a credit. But in our comic book, you get a credit.

MAX: When we started out with MS. TREE, it was designed to be an experiment in coherence. We looked around at what was

happening in comics and what I saw was that, from a writing standpoint, there was a lot of overwriting, and a lot of explainng what was in the picture that we were seeing, so that the redoundancy factor was high. And Terry was seeing a lot of well-designed but incoherent pages. We decided to revert to the classic, I won't say six-panels-a-page. format, because we do vary from that a good deal. But we did go back to the Golden Age/Silver Age kinds of page layouts.

TERRY: Using the conventions of the medium — because they work.

MAX: These conventions are there for a reason. There has been, I think, too much attention paid to the shape of panels, and maybe not enough to what is going into them. You know when you go to a **Hitchcock** movie, the shape of the screen doesn't constantly change. It is distracting. We really don't want anything to get in the way of the story. People come to MS. TREE to read the story, not to see the pretty pictures. This takes nothing away from Terry's art, I don't think. I think this says volumes favorably about Terry's work, because the work is in service of the story. He is as much a storyteller as I am — that is what our business is. It is not my business to write it and his to illustrate it. He is not simply the gracenotes, he is the real stuff. He tells that story. Some of the best panels I've written are silent ones. And I think that is true of most writers. I think if you ask most of the writers in this business, they really take pride in pages that are minimal! That isn't to say that is the only thing to do — and you use words when you have to, so don't misread this — but sometimes that way is the best, the most is the least.

PETER: *One of the things that I'll broach in regard to this is the relationship to an editor, being on the other side of the coin as a writer at Marvel, where there is a lot of back and forth, especially these days. Everytime it goes through, the editor adds something, almost always. Very often there can be a lot of copy added, because they don't trust the reader to pick up on subtler clues. In MS. TREE you often have something in the art that is not pointed out. That is a clue.*

What kind of editing do you have these days, on MS. TREE?.

1985 Collins & Beatty

"If you see him on the floor with blood,

OH, HELLO, MS. TREE. I...I'M AFRAID MY HUSBAND'S A LITTLE OUT OF SORTS RIGHT NOW...
I should say. He wasn't dead, but he might be soon.. I called an ambulance, then went back to Mrs. Frasman-
© 1986 First Comics, Inc.

The Strange Case of the Undead Deadman -- from the First Comics Pls mini-series.

MAX: The MS. TREE editing at this point, is completely non-existent. When it was at Eclipse, it was minimal. When **Dean Mullaney** was essentially editing the book, it was pretty much non-existent. **Cat Yronwode** put her two cents in when she was editing it, but no major interference. Now that **Deni Loubert** is our publisher, she doesn't even see the book until it comes back from the printer. She trusts us.

TERRY: We send the book directly to the printer, and we edit each other.

MAX: Sure — that is part of being a team.

TERRY: I catch typos, and I'll question a line occasionally if it doesn't quite work for me. Max will point out if I've drawn someone with crossed-eyes, or if something isn't clear.

MAX: And we both take criticism so graciously. *(Laughter.)*

TERRY: Yeah, these are usually such polite little sessions.

MAX: Usually Terry will say, "What do ya mean? There's nothing wrong with that drawing. Go away!" And the next day I come in and the drawing is completely redone. I am about equally as insane, you know. It works out.

We did have the experience of working for First Comics. We worked in what is now the traditional, conventional way of doing comics, which we found very instructional. And we did come away from it feeling that we could work that way and be pleased with what we had come up with, but preferring the way we do it on MS. TREE.

PETER: *Do you still feel that writing comics by plotting and then dialoguing is dubbing in a Godzilla movie?*

MAX: Absolutely.

TERRY: I agree. I think drawing from a plot is like sending actors out onto a stage with an outline, rather than a play to do.

PETER: *Which, of course, has been done in previous eras.*

TERRY: It can be pretty good. You can see in SECOND CITY — it can succeed and it can also fall flat on its butt. And I don't think that you are going to get a HAMLET out of improv. *(Laughter.)*

PETER: *For those of you listening to this, Terry has just made a paper airplane and thrown it across the room —*

A VOICE FROM BEYOND: And he missed me!

PETER: *— at Joe Judt and Larry Marder, by the way.*

THE VOICE: Hi Mom!

TERRY: Whom I think wanted to get their names in this interview real bad, which was why they were making noise, and which was why I threw the airplane at them!

MAX: At First, I was working mostly with **Mike Gold**. He edited the first two issues and then **Rick Obadiah**...

TERRY: **Rick Oliver**.

PETER: *One of them Ricks.*

MAX: One of the LEGION OF RICKS.

TERRY: One of the LEGION OF SUBSTITUTE RICKS.

MAX: Mike knows me very, very well, and he knows how I work and he really paid some editorial deference to me. He'd call me on the phone and run all the editorial changes past me as requests, and we would talk about them. I really don't mind that kind of editing, and if you have a good editor, you can come up with a better product that way. I kind of prefer minimal editing. If I have to have editing, I would like it to be someone sharp because a bad editor can really muck it up. I mean that with an "F" basically.

The P.I.s was instructive because we had been sort of renegades — which is even the name of our publisher now, Renegade Press. And it was good for *us* to work in the *real* comic-book world. I think it was good for people on the outside to see that Terry and I could perform and conform to that system. Terry has been working strictly as an inker. No one had ever seen him inking anyone else's work and I...

TERRY: Including myself.

MAX: And I think that he showed on his work with **Joe Staton's** pencils that he can ink next to anybody. Just recently we did the MUNDEN'S BAR story in which he pencilled and had his work inked by **Don Lomax**. The result was very interesting and effective. We are really enjoying this kind of home-away-from-home that we have with First. I hope that every year, we will do some kind of project with them, graphic novel or whatever. I did write the MUNDEN'S BAR story full script. I really don't want to work so-called "Marvel Style" again. There was too much of my sort of having to "fix" things. I had to look at what the artist decided to do, and I extrapolated from my plot, varying from my own intentions, and somehow figure out how to move the boat back somewhat to where I intended it to be.

I'll give you a very specific example: In the third issue there was a character who was the father, the mean step-father of this kind of neurotic comic book collector. The whole punchline of this story is when this kid essentially becomes a super-hero, or at least his twisted notion of what a super-hero is, and when he dies and the publicity hits, all of these sick and twisted comic book strips that he had drawn and had been rejected, were posthumously accepted. This mean step-father, who criticized his step-son for being involved in comics, saying it was worthless and that he should get a job, gets all the money from the sale of the publica-

then read my captions, I un-kill him."

tion rights to these books! Well, Joe, in drawing the book, killed the father in the first half of the third issue because he thought there had to be some action and some blood — which made it exceptionally hard for me to do the pay-off.

PETER: *I see.*

MAX: If you take a look at the comic to see him laying on the floor with blood scattered around like half the ketchup from the nearest Heinz factory, and then you read my captions, you'll see that I un-kill him. I say, "he's not in good shape, but he is not dead yet." And he goes to the hospital. I shouldn't have to play a game like that. And it is not Joe's fault, since he has to obviously flesh out the synopsis, and since we are working in other cities, how does he know just how important that punch-line is that I intended to do, because it is just a little throwaway line in the synopsis? Then there was a goof at First in the editing and the punchline was omitted anyway! The folks at First fired somebody over that.

So anyway it is the system there — I really don't blame Joe. I really like his work in the book.

TERRY: The artist cannot read the writer's mind. I have trouble with the concept of going in and drawing the characters doing things, and kind of hopping around, and kind of following this outline to a story and not knowing what they are saying, and doing the fight scene and not knowing if they are going to say "Ow" or "Ooh" because the mouth's in a different position when you say "Ow" than it is when you say "Ooh." I want my script. I want my characters to have their dialogue. I want my actors to know their lines before they go on stage. I really believe in full script.

MAX: Unfortunately, comics are turned out so quickly and writers are paid so poorly, they don't begin to get what they deserve . . .

PETER: *Neither do artists.*

MAX: Neither do artists, of course, but then, I think that everyone is underpaid. Yet I really think that writers are underpaid, because that is why writers have had to go along with the practice of dubbing-in the dialogue. You can work faster that way. You absolutely can. I mean, I wrote one of the P.I.s issues in an afternoon. That is why writers get paid less — they can work faster than artists.

TERRY: It is also why we are more neurotic.

MAX: Oh, I wouldn't say that.

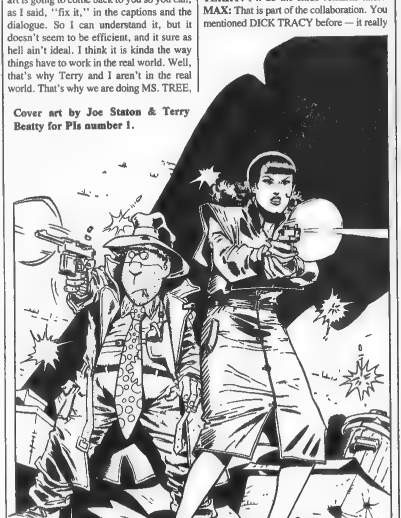
PETER: *One of the problems with doing a full-script — if, for example, you were working at DC in the early Sixties — is that you would write a full script and you would never see it again, not until it appeared in print, and if you couldn't trust the artist to interpret it rightly, you could often end up with an incomprehensible book. So you write the description: "Big, donut-shaped space-ship shooting out multiple-colored rays, sucking people up off the street." Dialogue, GREEN LANTERN: "Great galaxies! A giant donut-shaped spaceship, shooting out multi-colored rays, picking up people" . . .*

TERRY: You want to be sure that it gets across.

PETER: *Because you don't know if the artist is going to draw the thing off-panel — that can happen sometimes.*

MAX: That is the one advantage that I see to working Marvel-style — If you don't know who your artist is, the art is going to come back to you so you can, as I said, "fix it," in the captions and the dialogue. So I can understand it, but it doesn't seem to be efficient, and it sure as hell ain't ideal. I think it is kinda the way things have to work in the real world. Well, that's why Terry and I aren't in the real world. That's why we are doing MS. TREE.

Cover art by Joe Staton & Terry Beatty for PIs number 1.



syndicated-strip style, in the old-fashioned efficient way.

TERRY: And we live in the same town, not far from one another, see each other far too often, and go over the work together constantly.

MAX: This may be the interview to reveal that we hate each other.

TERRY: Just dreadfully. Max and I go over the artwork every step of the way. He sees the pencils, he checks the lettering. Things get re-worked. He looks at it while I ink it.

MAX: I even sharpen the pencils.

PETER: *Very good.*

TERRY: That was a snide remark.

MAX: And I do the snide remarks when he isn't doing the snide remarks, which is most of the time.

TERRY: I'll do the snide remarks later.

MAX: That is part of the collaboration. You mentioned DICK TRACY before — it really

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Ron

"I really think writers are underpaid."

did grow out of my experience on DICK TRACY, which was working with an artist who lived in another city, and doing what you were talking about, Peter — which was sending my script, and seeing it when it was finished. I still get to look at photostats at the same time that the syndicate sees them. But I can only make minimal changes. Sometimes, by the time I get the photostats, it has already gone through the whole process, and it has already gone to newspapers, and I really can't change it. Mistakes do go through. The first artist that I had on DICK TRACY, **Rick Fletcher** — who really did a fine job I think — I did not have an ideal relationship with. He was somewhat resentful of my role with the strip, because he had hoped to take over the strip, lock, stock and barrel himself, including the writing. So to a degree, I was just this guy imposed upon him. While we did, I think, first-rate work together, this prevented us from having the kind of collaboration which results in that which they call synergy: 2 plus 2 equals 5. **Fletcher** and I could always do 2 plus 2 equals 4, and it was a real good 4, but because we were in different towns and there was an age barrier, there was that resentment there, it caused problems. So I craved a truly more collaborative collaboration. With Terry, in my own hometown, it seemed like the ideal thing. I had known him since he was in high school and had seen his talent, and I was kind of waiting for him to get to the point where his competence was such that we could get away with it — and we have been getting away with it ever since.

PETER: *Is this lack of coherence one of the reasons you think that mystery comic books don't tend to work or haven't tended to work?*

MAX: Well, what we were talking about before, I think, is absolutely true, you just cannot do a mystery comic book without doing it full-script — uh, we did it in the P.I.s, but we were doing the absolutely impossible, and I never want to do it again.

TERRY: I think... *(loud noises.)*

ALL: Could you please keep it down?

MAX: Next time, we shouldn't do an interview in the Men's Room. We really have to plan a less public place. How about the Ladies' Room?

PETER: *Actually, the "Free John Byrne Autographs" sign at the front of the table probably got them going.*

TERRY: A mystery story is not going to have the same kind of drive that you need if you are working from a plot, taking pages, and making pretty designs out of them. I think it is very neccessary to have your pages one, two, three, four, five, and your dialogue down, know who is speaking, who speaks next and, if there is a fight scene, who throws what and why.

MAX: You know even doing the P.I.s, anticipating the problem, I did not try to structure a mystery that would be surprising. I do not think that anyone following the P.I.s had much problem figuring out what was going on. I don't think they were way ahead of the story, but I think that they were not surprised. Now, I do like the surprise. I realize that inherently, I did not feel that I would be able to do that. I put together a somewhat different story in the P.I. s than we do in MS. TREE.

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Ms. TREE 3-D

BY MAX COLLINS and TERRY BEATTY

Guest Appearance by MIKE MIST

SHIPPING JULY

Renegade Press

ADS BY CRIS PALOMINO

"The critics at COMICS JOURNAL are poopy."

© 1985 Mickey Spillane

PETER: *Al, do you consider yourself a writer, or a mystery writer?*

MAX: Well, I consider myself a writer, but I do not mind the mystery-writer designation. For one thing, I have also been typed as a comics writer. When you've been typed as a comics writer, getting typed as a mystery writer is a step up. You don't mind. One of the frustrations for me was that I had published six mystery novels before I had written comics but as soon as I started doing comics, I ceased being a mystery writer in reviews and turned into the comics writer who also writes mysteries. Which I kind of resent, because I was a mystery writer first. The comics are the branching off. I love comics and I don't look down on them in any way, I really don't mind the typecasting, if it helps give me an image or an identity out there and people come to my work. That's all I really care about.

PETER: *I've read TRUE DETECTIVE and I think that it is truly phenomenal.*

MAX: Thank you.

PETER: *Of course, it really helps, living in Chicago.*

MAX: It helps.

PETER: *It is a wonderful book. You could almost call yourself an historical novelist.*

MAX: Definitely, it was.

PETER: *And Terry, I remember one very startling piece of artwork that I saw, which I really was a bit of a joke, was the "Flipper Goes to Art School" cover of JUST IMAGINE. Was that partly to show people that you could do all of that stuff?*

TERRY: Well, sure, people do have tendency to typecast cartoonists.

PETER: *Like, for instance, THE JOURNAL reviewing MS. TREE and showing six scowls in a row.*

MAX: Showing all of the three-quarter front views of a face and saying "this is what all the artwork looks like" — slightly unfair. Also when they reviewed the entire first story, which was a six-issue serial during which Terry improved quite a bit, they only took examples from the first chapter or two because it would tend to support their thesis that Terry couldn't draw. Because if they had taken examples from the fifth or sixth chapters, their thesis would have fallen apart. We just feel that the critics at THE COMICS JOURNAL are kind of poopy. *(Laughter.)*

TERRY: Oh geez. Are we going to be sued for calling them poopy?

MAX: I don't know. It could be another big lawsuit.

PETER: *P-O-U-P-E-E.*

MAX: In fairness, there has been a favorable review or two of MS. TREE published in the pages of Fantagraphics. Most of the folks over there don't really care much for what we are doing, though I don't think it has as much to do with MS. TREE as it has to do with some personality conflicts that pre-date the book. Terry attacking them in the pages of THE BUYER'S GUIDE and such. I think that people pretty much ignore what they say about us. They're shooting blanks.

"MIDNIGHT MONDAY. NASTY, RAINY... THE NIGHT CHARGED WITH TEMPER. THAT'S WHEN IT STARTED. WHERE? THE BOWERY... SURE, LAUGH AT IT IF YOU WANT - OR SNEER MAYBE - BUT DOWN THERE ARE MY KIND OF PEOPLE. THEY DON'T HAVE MUCH - BUT THEY DON'T WANT MUCH EITHER."
TATTOO
HAIRCUT
FIRST BY PHOENIX FEATURES

"I don't think many people have been as influenced as we are by Ed Robbins MIKE HAMMER strip."

TERRY: The point that I was making before we got off onto Fantagraphics was that people do tend to typecast cartoonists, they look at the work that the artist is currently doing, they will look at my work and say, "Okay, he draws these rigid, very structured detective stories." And think that is all that I can do. Well, I can do super-hero stories. I've done a lot of humor work. I've done very straight illustration work — a lot of commercial work.

MAX: Book covers, album covers.

TERRY: Most cartoonists have a lot of

"THEN THERE'RE THE OTHERS. THEY HAVE MUCH - AND WANT MORE. GREEDY, HUNGRY PEOPLE WHO DON'T BELONG THERE. PEOPLE LIKE THE HALF-BLONDE. SHE'S ONE BABE I'LL NEVER FORGET..."

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"With MS. TREE we don't 'comic book' it up."

range but unfortunately do get typecast. But you look at the overall careers of people like **Jack Davis** and **Wally Wood** and these people did about everything that you could do or can do in comics from totally goofy off-the-wall funny stuff to grim, serious stories.

MAX: **Wood** is the perfect example.

PETER: *For example, seeing* **Jack Kirby**'s sketches, when he would sometimes draw in a style completely different from his comics work, can be an education.

Speaking of education — this is a segue...

MAX: We're talking segues here...

PETER: *Is there someone that you have been influenced by, that you think is underrepresented or under-appreciated in comics or outside comics?*

MAX: In fiction, obviously, **Mickey Spillane**— despite his popularity — is frequently denigrated. I have a few favorites who are little known. A guy named **Mike Roscoe** who wrote detective novels in the '50s. **Jim Thompson** is a writer that I have been championing for years, who is now coming into vogue. In comics, as far as people who haven't had their just-due praise, I would single out **Johnny Craig**. I would like to think that Terry and I, by invoking his name as often as we do and my writing the notes on **Craig** for the CRIME-SUSPENSE STORIES set that **Russ Cochran** reprinted, I would like to think that in the last year or two, we have had something to do with **Craig**'s name starting to get the respect that he deserves. Five or ten years ago, you didn't see much about him, but in the last few years, his name has been appearing. I think that we have been priming that pump. And I expect **Johnny Craig** to put a check in the mail to us tomorrow.

TERRY: Both Max and I are fans and appreciate quite a few artists who don't seem to be fan favorites. We have caused ruckuses in comic-book shops when we have mentioned that we both admire the work of **Frank Robbins.**

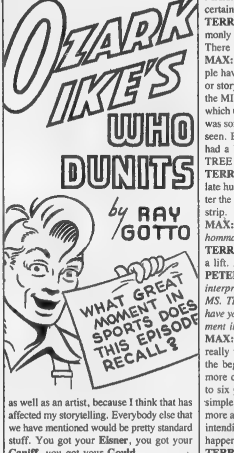
PETER: *I love him as well.*

TERRY: It seems to be that professionals love the man's work and that fans hate the man's art with a passion.

MAX: Because fans tend to like work that reflects whatever the house-style was at the point the fan entered fandom.

TERRY: I respect artists that have a distinctly personal style, and make a strong statement with their artwork. **Robbins** is certainly one and so is **Craig.**

MAX: And there are a lot of syndicated people that we like. I like **Ray Gotto** very much — of OZARK IKE — and I think that he had a certain influence on Terry. And most of the EC people. You know that when I bring Craig up, I mention him as a writer



as well as an artist, because I think that has affected my storytelling. Everybody else that we have mentioned would be pretty standard stuff. You got your **Elsner**, you got your **Caniff**, you got your **Gould**...

TERRY: You got your **Kurtzman.**

MAX: Not to downplay that, because it is certainly important.

TERRY: These are artists who are commonly recognized to be masters of the form. There is not much arguing about that.

MAX: Whereas I don't think too many people have been as influenced in terms of art or storytelling as we are by **Ed Robbins** in the MIKE HAMMER strip, for example — which until I lobbied to get it back into print was something that hardly anyone had even seen. But Terry and I had seen it — and it had a big influence on the way that MS. TREE was shaped.

TERRY: In fact, Mike Tree, Ms. Tree's late husband, was very much patterned after the Mike Hammer of **Ed Robbins** comic strip.

MAX: That is what we call in Iowa "an *homnage.*"

TERRY: Or as they call it in the real world, a lift. A rip-off. A steal.

PETER: *This is a question that you might interpret as leading, but when you say that MS. TREE is an experiment in coherence, have you been interested in doing an experiment in other things...*

MAX: I am pretty linear as a writer. I am really very A,B,C,D,E. I do think that in the beginning MS. TREE was a little bit more consciously minimal, really holding to six panels a page, keeping the art very simple, and as it has evolved, it has gotten more and more illustrational without really intending to but, like red hair, has just happened.

TERRY: The feature has pretty much demanded growth.

From JOHNNY HAZARD by Frank Robbins, circa 1947.

YE-AH, I'VE BEEN READING 'BOUT THOSE THREE "TORRID" DAYS ...AREN'T THE "ROBINS" OUT EARLY THIS YEAR? AND SINCE SHE WOKE THAT EARLY...
STEVE

© 1985 King Features Syndicate ■ 1985 Ray Gotto

"The latest John Byrne FANTASTIC

MAX: But we have opened up, for us anyway, storytelling. If you compare the Eclipse to the Aardvark-Vanaheim issues, there are fewer panels per page now, a big variation between layouts on pages. When people that lay the "old fashioned layout" charge on us, sometimes, I wonder what they are talking about — 'cause I'll open up the latest **John Byrne** issue of FANTASTIC FOUR, and it looks pretty much like the layouts we're doing to me! Would you agree, Terry?

TERRY: Yes. Certainly. We are just not doing things like taking a page and doing a design of a head, and then filling panels in inside of that, that is interesting, and it looks nice, but it doesn't have much to do with narrative drive, which is what I am concerned with.

PETER: *I guess I should ask you about the move of MS. TREE from Eclipse to Aardvark-Vanaheim and the conversion of a book that was full color to a book that is a three-color book.*

TERRY: Two-color book. Duotone.

PETER: *Black and white.*

TERRY: Black, white and another color. The other color changes from issue to issue.

PETER: *In a way, it seems to be paralleling the perversity of your careers, but how do you feel about it? Are you comfortable with it? Is it growing on you?*

TERRY: Oh, we are very happy to work with **Deni**. This is not to bad-mouth Eclipse, but we finished our contract with Eclipse and we talked with other people.

The MS. TREE team: Max watches Terry 'tooning.

MAX: Both Eclipse in a very serious way and First in a more tentative way, approached us about doing MS. TREE. Neither of them were talking, at least immediately, about our own book. Dean was talking about using us in what was still being published as ECLIPSE MONTHLY. Having ten pages of that book. When we had the opportunity to continue on in our own book, we just felt that it was a step in the right direction, rather than backwards.

And we had problems of frequency, with MS. TREE at Eclipse. We made all our deadlines, but for reasons that weren't entirely clear to us, the book seldom came out on time. There was a notorious gap of three to four months, between issues #3 and #4, during which we lost circulation that we never regained. The first three issues sold quite nicely.

TERRY: It is quite hard to keep up reader interest if the book doesn't keep up schedule. And at A-V, and now at Renegade, the books come out monthly, like clockwork. That means that I have to work harder because I have to get those books in by deadline, but that's okay. Deni also told us right up front that she wanted to do a book collection in the SWORDS OF CEREBUS format, collecting the first several MS. TREE stories. That was something that we wanted to do from the very beginning. That was something that we had planned from Day One, and didn't seem to be happening at Eclipse. And when she made that offer, we said, "Yeah."

MAX: That was one of the main points. And the book, THE FILES OF MS. TREE has done very well. The first print run is sold out. It may still be at some bookstores, but they're all gone from A-V.

PETER: *I want to ask you about this two-color format. Were you doing the color at Eclipse?*

TERRY: No. I am doing the two-color work. At Eclipse, **Petra Goldberg Scotese** and **Jan Brunner** both colored the book, and both did very nice jobs.

MAX: Didn't **Dennis McFarling** color some issues?

Johnny Craig art: CRIME SUSPENSTORIES.

© 1986 EC, Inc.

FOUR looks like the layouts we're doing!"

TERRY: Yes he did, as well as designing the current MS. TREE logo. Thanks for reminding me. And he did a nice job also. But we weren't wild about the way the four color looked on the feature and the Baxter paper.

MAX: Pretty garish.

TERRY: Pretty garish for a moody detective story. It is difficult to get the *film noir* mood that we want with the bright Baxter paper. With the duotone we set a mood immediately. And also, I am doing the cover overlays by hand, and I am able to do much fancier color work than we would be able to get, if we were doing four color and sending it out to the color separaters. I am doing extra little drawings on the color overlays, going into little areas. Doing some fancy stuff here and there that I think adds an extra-nice little touch to the book. It's also keeping the books in the color racks in the comic-book shops rather than being shuffled off onto the black-and-white underground/fanzine rack where it doesn't belong.

MAX: We've had a generally very positive response from readers. I would say that nine out of ten readers who write us are very praise worthy of the two tone, or the duotone, whatever you want to call it. But when someone doesn't like it, they tend to not like it in a big way. They just don't get it. It is not anything that they've seen before and we are bumping up against that. It is not a process that most American comic-book buyers are used to, even though it's common overseas, even though those of us who collected comics for many years, saw it on, for instance, the inside covers of Dell comics, and we saw versions of TIN-TIN, published this way in children's magazines. And it was common, not some aberrant form, for most older comics fans. So it may take some getting used to, in some cases. And we have been doing a lot of fine tuning. It is very tough to do this. We don't know what it is going to look like when we do a new color. We don't know what it is going to look like until it comes back from the printer. So it is risky. I think it has paid off. I think it is preferable to black and white. And right now it is not feasible to do color. Because at this point, I do not think that we would sell enough issues more to justify it, financially speaking. Terry is pretty much determined to do the color himself if it does go to color.

TERRY: And I don't have the time.

MAX: So, for a couple of reasons, it isn't feasible right now. I would like ideally to see somewhere down the road, trade paperback collections not unlike THE FILES OF MS. TREE on slick paper in bookstores, *ala* ELFQUEST. And, in fact, one of our hopes and dreams is that over the next five years, MS. TREE will gradually become to mystery fiction what ELFQUEST became to science/fantasy. So that when you go into the Waldenbooks store, there will be a MS. TREE collection, just as there is an ELFQUEST. I don't think that is an unrealistic goal. I think that can happen

PETER: *In general, people in comics largely feel that they are in a ghetto, which is curious because five of the top ten paperback bestsellers are comics.*

MAX: Very good point. There is a snobbish attitude imposed upon us. I have no condescension toward the form. I think that it is great. One of the things that kind of marks and defines MS. TREE is that I take an approach in the book that is identical to the approach that I take to my novels. Anyone who reads my novels is not going to have any trouble with MS. TREE. We don't "comic book" it up. I make certain concessions because it is an overtly visual medium. Therefore, in every issue there has to be some kind of action — it may not be a five-page fight scene — it may just be Ms. Tree grabbing someone by the shirt and throwing them up against a wall. Maybe that's it. But there has to be some overt action. And that also has to do with the serialization format. If I were between two covers, I wouldn't have to worry about that. But every issue has to work as a unit. So there has to be some action in it. And MS. TREE is consciously a bit pulpier than my novels — there is more bloodshed, the bodies pile up, and and she is more tied to the conventions of the private eye *genre*. In none of my other fiction do I do a private eye as overtly as MS. TREE with all the conventional and even *cliche* baggage. Beyond that, however, it is very, very straight. We really don't play games with it. Even going private eye *genre* we have turned it on its head by making the hero a woman, which isn't that common — although, since we have done it, an amazing number of them have turned up here and there.

PETER: *I believe it was* **Howard Chaykin** *who first used the word "emblematic" when refering to comics — that you don't have to refer to stereotypes, but you do deal in emblems.*

MAX: Icons. You do have to touch buttons and little bells have to go off in the reader's mind. To a degree, comics is inherently a broader medium. But I don't think it is as *much* more broad than other visual media as people assume. It is *somewhat* more broad, but we are not baggy pants vaudeville here.

PETER: *I think that's about all the questions I've got.*

TERRY: That's good —because that is about all the tape you've got!

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"It's a totally different bag doing an

SAL BUSCEMA

After reading in MARVEL AGE that veteran Marvel artist Sal Buscema lives in Fairfax, Virginia, three hours from my home in Newport News, I set about contacting him to arrange an interview. The result was an invitation to the Buscema home, to conduct the conversation that follows for COMICS INTERVIEW.

Seizing an opportunity for some tourist-like fun, wife Tonja, daughter Connie and I headed to Washington, D.C., for the weekend. Arriving in Fairfax an hour and a half early, we decided to go into D.C. for some early sightseeing — big mistake! After being soundly thrashed by the D.C. traffic we arrived at Sal's home about thirty minutes late, despite which we were greeted by Sal and his wife Joan with a degree of warmth that most people save for old friends. While Tonja and Connie repaired to the game room with Sal's sons to watch TV and play ping pong, I settled into Sal's studio for what turned into a very interesting chat with the man who has probably drawn more of Marvel's characters than anyone else...

BRIAN TALLEY: *Was Marvel of the Sixties as fun and free-wheeling as they wanted readers to believe?*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Silvio Buscema.
Occupation: Comic-book illustrator.
Born: 26 January 1936 — Brooklyn, NY.
Residence: Fairfax, VA.
Credits: HULK, ROM, FANTASTIC FOUR, CAPTAIN AMERICA, DAREDEVIL, THOR, DEFENDERS, TARZAN, SPIDER-MAN, CONAN, etc., etc.
Funniest Excuse Ever Heard for Being Late: I had to wait for a plot while a writer argued over money with Marvel.
Favorite Non-Marvel Character: Yosemite Sam.

SAL BUSCEMA: Oh, yes. I started there in 1968, so I missed some of it, but I got into it at a point when things were really moving, really driving, and it was a lot of fun working for those people. I didn't really experience it that much because I live in Virginia, so I didn't get to the office that often — but when I did it was a very casual atmosphere. It was really a fun place to work — still is.

BRIAN: *How old were you when you realized that you wanted to draw for a living?*

SAL: Gee, that's kind of hard to say. As you know, my brother is an artist, and John is about eight years older than I am. So, when he got into comics, I was still a kid. He's been a great influence in my life in that respect, and I've sort of followed in his footsteps. So, for as far as how old I was, I was very young, and had been drawing since an early age.

BRIAN: *Was art one of your main interests in school?*

SAL: Oh yeah — always. I was the kid in grammar school and junior high that was

illustration and drawing for comics."

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"The group books are very difficult to do."

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usually picked to do the posters and that kind of stuff.

BRIAN: *Was there any interest in comics at that time?*

SAL: Absolutely.

BRIAN: *What did you enjoy?*

SAL: When I got a little older, I liked the EC comics. Not all of them, but some of them — the horror books, that series. They are considered classics now, and I wish that I still had the issues that I had back then. Unfortunately, I don't know where they are. I guess I threw away a small fortune.

BRIAN: *You worked with your brother, John Buscema, when you first went into comics, right?*

SAL: I worked with John for a short period. I did some of his backgrounds, tightened up his pencilling, and did some inking for him. I did this for about a year — but that was just before I went into the Army.

BRIAN: *Do you remember any of the books you worked on together?*

SAL: Oh, yeah. We worked together on ROY ROGERS, who was very big at the time. Most of the work John was doing at the time was for Dell Publishing, and ROY ROGERS was one of the books that he did regularly.

BRIAN: *I understand that you were an illustrator in the army?*

SAL: That's right.

BRIAN: *What type of art did you do in the service?*

SAL: Well, I was stationed at Fort Belvoir, which is just a few miles south of us, and that's an engineering post. I was attached to the training aids branch of the Engineer Corps. We did manuals and general training aids on engineering — bridge building, road paving, that kind of stuff.

BRIAN: *Do you still have any of the work that you did?*

SAL: I had one illustration that I did of a tank smashing through a bridge, demonstrating that the bridge was not built properly. It took me about three weeks to paint it, but in the Army you don't rush anything too much.

BRIAN: *Hurry up and wait.*

SAL: Yeah — hurry up and wait. *(Laughter.)* That's the only piece I ever saved, and I have no idea where the thing is — absolutely none. I don't even know if I've got it any more, but it helped me get what I would call my first really substantial art job, which was in Washington.

BRIAN: *What did you do after the Army?*

SAL: I went back to New York, where I'm originally from. That was during the recession, so it wasn't easy to get a job in the art business, or any business for that matter. Luckily, because of my Army connections, some of the civilian personnel I had worked with helped me make contacts with some people in Washington. They referred me to what at that time was the best art studio in D.C. It was called Creative Arts, and I was fortunate enough to get a very good job with them as an illustrator. That was essentially

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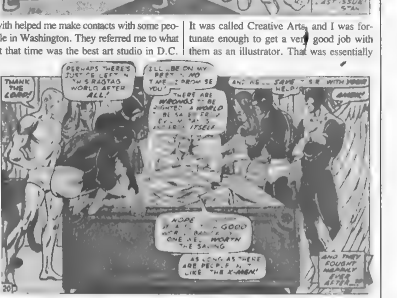
THANK THE LORD!
PERHAPS THERE'S JUSTICE LEFT IN THIS RADIOACTIVE WORLD AFTER ALL!
I'LL BE ON MY WAY IN A MINUTE—I'LL SHOW YOU!
THERE ARE MISSILES AIMED AT A WORLD IN A STATE OF CHAOS ITSELF!
AND AS—SAVE—SE WITH HONOR
AMEN!
AND THEY ROLLED AWAY!
AND AS LONG AS THERE ARE PEOPLE LIKE THE X-MEN!
200

They sure did--just ask Chris Claremont. Sal drew the first farewell issue.

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ON SALE NOW!

"My first pencil jobs. Boy, are they bad!"

the start of my new career, because I was only 20 years old at the time.

BRIAN: *Did you ever do any work in advertising?*

SAL: That's essentially what that was. I had a couple of very unattractive jobs that I had got in New York. They were very, very low paying because of my lack of experience. They didn't count the experience that I had in the Army — whereas in Washington that experience counted a lot because of the government connection. The jobs in New York were with very small ad agencies — they were one-man operations. There was nowhere to go, no real atmosphere for growth. But the job in D.C. had the atmosphere for growth. It was a large studio, employing about sixty or seventy people, and they did everything from animation to advertising, and everything in between, so it was a marvelous opportunity for a beginner.

BRIAN: *Did you do a little bit of everything?*

SAL: Well, I've got some friends in animation. One of my very best friends, **Richard Drew**, was a very good animator. Unfortunately, he passed away recently. He had worked with and met **Bill Cosby** on the first FAT ALBERT special. Anyway, because of him, there was some influence. For a time — when we were working for the same studio some years ago — he was giving me pointers on animation, but I never really got into it much.

BRIAN: *How long did you stay there before you went back into comics?*

SAL: I was what they call a "commercial artist" in advertising graphics for about thirteen years before I went into comic books.

I have to digress for a minute. John was also in advertising. He was in comics, then got out of comics in the Fifties because of all of the bad problems the business was having — outfits were going out of business every day. All of the little companies that were producing maybe a half-dozen books a month just folded up. The only ones that stayed alive were Timely and DC; Archie and Charlton, too. Only the bigger ones were able to survive. Because of that, he got out of comics and into advertising, and he stayed there for a few years. One day he happened to bump into **Stan Lee** by accident, and Stan asked him if he would like to do some comic-book work for him. He said that the company was doing fine. This was in the middle Sixties, and Marvel was really making their comeback — or had been making it for some time. They were really thriving again and that's how John got reinstated into comics.

Now, I had always wanted to do comic books, but the opportunity had never presented itself. It was a case of bad timing. When I was ready to go into the business in the early Fifties, the business was just about ready to fold. But when the opportunity finally came, I was ready to take a crack at it. I hadn't been involved in comics for so many years that I literally had to work for a year every night and every weekend to learn how to do comics all over again. I had never been into comics that much to begin with — I had worked on them from sort of a periphery.

BRIAN: *So you had to learn from a technical standpoint?*

SAL: Yeah. Telling the story and working on my drawing. It's a totally different bag doing an illustration for an advertisement and drawing for comic books. You look at **Jack Kirby**'s work — the master comic-book illustrator — the difference is obvious, especially to the pro. Consequently, you have to retrain yourself, and this is what I did for one year, until I got to the point where I thought that I was ready. Stan then saw my samples — I think I did four or five pages of pencils, and that was in 1968 — and I got my first job for Marvel, an inking job, later that year.

BRIAN: *Would these be some of your first pencilling jobs?*

(Shows copies of AVENGERS #68 & #69.)

SAL: Oh, my!! These were the first pencil jobs. Boy, are they bad! *(Laughter.)* I started inking on a western character — some cowboy that I can't remember. He was the Black something or other, because of the black outfit and hat. I think his guns were black, too.

BRIAN: *But THE AVENGERS was your first pencil work?*

SAL: Right. They really threw me a curve there, because I had no idea that they would start me on something like that! The group

One of Sal's rare covers. "I don't think they like my covers."

ATLANTA FANTASY FAIR

ATLANTA

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"The Surfer was a wimpy superhero."

books are very difficult to do, and not having any experience . . .

BRIAN: *Did you think that you would start on one of the lesser titles?*

SAL: Yes, that's what I thought, but they did that because that was when the Silver Surfer was becoming popular, and Stan wanted John to do the SURFER book. So he took John off THE AVENGERS and he put me on it. I did a few issues, and I assume they were pleased with them, because I've been with Marvel ever since.

BRIAN: *You inked some of John's issues of the SILVER SURFER, and the Surfer has always been a popular character — probably always will be — yet the book didn't last. Why do you think that happened?*

SAL: It's a hard question to answer. I think it's one of the most unique characters ever created for comic books, a very powerful character. I think — well, this is my personal opinion, and if **Stan Lee** ever reads this he'll probably get mad at me, but I have to say it anyway. I think that Stan wanted to make him a very compassionate character. There was a lot of emotion in the stories that he wrote. But I think that it was overdone and got to the point where the Surfer was almost a weak sister, a wimpy kind of super-hero. This is just my personal theory.

BRIAN: *Do you think it could sell and last today?*

SAL: I don't know. I understand that it is very popular in Europe. The books are supposed to be selling like hotcakes over there, and anything connected with the Silver Surfer goes over really big. Why it doesn't over here, I don't know. Those were tremendous books. I think that they were some of the most beautiful books that were ever illustrated. John did some fantastic work on them.

BRIAN: *Issue #4 with the Surfer versus Thor is my favorite of the series.*

SAL: That was the first one that I inked. I wish you could have seen the pencils. They were so beautifully done that it was almost a shame to ink them. They were a lot of fun to work on.

BRIAN: *You guys ever talk about working together again?*

SAL: No, we haven't. It might be kind of fun, but I don't know how we would. John is a supreme penciller, so it would be fun to ink him again — but I don't do that much inking any more, and I don't know if *he* would want to ink *my* work. *(Laughter.)* Maybe one of these days it will happen.

BRIAN: *You've lived here in Virginia the whole time that you've worked for Marvel?*

SAL: Yes, it's beautiful country and I love it. The old adage about being able to take the boy out of the city but not take the city out of the boy doesn't apply to me, because all of the city is out of my system. There are advantages — I don't have any commuting problem because I work at home. I work in an atmosphere that's conducive to creativity. The disadvantages are that I work alone and I don't have that exchange with my peers, which is very important for an artist.

BRIAN: *Do you miss that?*

SAL: Absolutely. I really do. As a matter of fact, **Jim Shooter** is always asking me to come to New York more often. I was up there just yesterday to discuss a new project with him. It's fun to get together with the people who are creating the other books to see what they are doing. Not just seeing the books every month when Marvel sends them to me, but seeing the original work, the pencils before they're inked, talking to the writers and editors — it's an atmosphere that I really miss. I don't, however, miss it enough to move back to New York.

BRIAN: *I can see why — this is nice country. The view here is really gorgeous.*

SAL: This part of the county, the western part of Fairfax County, is really beautiful, and this is sort of a dream come true for me. I grew up in South Brooklyn, and you know the gag — I didn't know what a tree looked like until I was nine and saw my first one. Well, that's not too far from the truth, believe me! *(Laughter.)* This is something I really longed for — a place in the country. It's been a delight for me to be able to afford this kind of thing and to give it to my family.

BRIAN: *To you, how different is the Marvel of today from the Marvel of when you started?*

SAL: Well, I could broaden it by saying it's not just Marvel, but the entire industry that's different. The industry is essentially Marvel and DC. Marvel is pretty well controling the industry and outselling everybody. At least, that's what I'm told, and I have no reason to doubt it, because of the amount of special

SURFER splash inked by Sal. "Some of the most beautiful books ever illustrated." His brother, John, did the pencil art.

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SAL BUSCEMA
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"Guys today are great talents, but I'm not

projects, and mini-series, and graphic novels — they're coming out of the woodwork. It seems like the public wants more and more and I think that, essentially, that's the change in the industry.

It was a lot less businesslike back when I started. It was casual — I think that's the best word to describe it. It was very casual in the sense that there was not a very rigid businesslike structure involved. It was guys bringing in work, and guys being late. There was no real business atmosphere. Now there are still guys bringing in work late and things like that, but the structure has changed and is now very businesslike. This has been a boon to the creative people because we are doing a lot better now than we were back then.

There was a time when an artist or writer or whomever had absolutely no security. The only security you had was your ability. If you were good enough to command a decent price, which even by all commercial art standards was ridiculously low, and good enough to command enough work so that you could work all the time, and fast enough to produce a lot of work — volume, in other words — you could make a decent living. But that was it — you got no benefits. It's different today. Anyone employed or under contract to a comic-book publisher gets pretty much the same benefits an employee of any other good-sized company would get — vacation, holidays, insurance, etc.

Also, at one time the industry was almost a sub-culture — I don't know how else to describe it. Now everybody knows about Spider-Man and the Hulk. Not just comic fans, but everybody. They're getting into TV and the movies. They are becoming a very big thing and a part of our lives — sort of like rock music and soap operas. So, in that sense, the industry has grown tremendously, and I think that it's better for everyone involved. It's also better for the fans, because I think they are getting a better product.

Let me add one thing to that: I don't want to sound like I'm hedging — it may sound like I'm saying that what's being done today is better than what was done fifteen years ago. That's not the case at all. We have a broader quality base now. There were some fantastic books being done — the SILVER SURFER issues that Stan and John did, or the FANTASTIC FOUR books that Stan and Jack did. Those are classics, and I don't think that anyone will ever produce anything better than that in the truest sense of the term "comic book."

Today, there are so many more good artists and writers, and more variety of style in both. For a while, Marvel was **Stan Lee**, and then others came in — **Roy Thomas** and so on, and that was basically it. You had three or four artists doing most of the work. Now you have dozens. It's still a very small industry, only several hundred people, but the talent pool is so much bigger, and it's growing every day.

BRIAN: *Do you prefer working from a plot or a full script?*

SAL: I prefer the plot. I enjoy having as much freedom as possible, and the full script is terribly restrictive. I've worked both ways, but I prefer the plot.

BRIAN: *What about full pencils or breakdowns?*

SAL: I was doing breakdowns for years, because for years, what was expected of me was production. I was doing a tremendous amount of work. That's another change in the industry. Speed, while important, is not absolutely essential now. It's not a question of grinding out the work. There is an emphasis on quality now, and because of that I am now doing full pencils. Occasionally, I will do a breakdown job — I just finished a couple of books that were having scheduling trouble. Doing breakdowns does not mean that the quality is less, it means that it's faster because I don't have to put in blacks, and the pencilling doesn't have to be as tight. I also inked one of them, an issue of THOR that Walt Simonson wrote.

BRIAN: *It's been a while since you pencilled and inked a book.*

SAL: The last ones were HULK and ROM. It's a lot of work to pencil and ink two books a month, and while I wasn't losing ground, I wasn't gaining any either.

BRIAN: *You are recognized as one of the best storytellers in the business — what, to you, is good storytelling?*

SAL: Let me put it this way: if you can illustrate a story and get it across to your reader without any dialogue, captions, or balloons — just with pictures - then you have told a beautiful pictorial story. That would be the ideal situation. Obviously, you can't have that all the time, because some sequences of a story will demand a certain amount of explanation. If you can tell your story with just your pictures, and make it dynamic and dramatic and moving — and grab your reader — then that's storytelling and you're doing your job.

BRIAN: *Whose work do you admire?*

SAL: Well, of course, I think the greatest

Sample of Sal's pencils for Marvel's BALDER THE BRAVE mini-series.

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so sure they're good *"comic-book"* talents."

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WE CAN DO FAR MORE THAN SIMPLY TALK, GIANT...
...AS YOU SHALL SOON LEARN, AT THE HANDS OF DR SPECTRUM, AND HIS POTENT POWER PRISM!
MY NAME, WHICH TITANS HAVE HAD CAUSE TO FEAR, IS... HYPERION!
THOSE WHO SPEAK OF ME IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT CALL ME... NIGHT-HAWK!
AND NONE CAN EQUAL THE MATCH-LESS SPEED OF THE WONDROUS WHIZZER!
YOU ARE DOOMED, AVENGERS... DOOMED TO FALL BEFORE THE COMBINED MIGHT OF...
NEXT: DOOM THE SQUADRON SINISTER
20

Shades of today's SQUADRON SUPREME-- from AVENGERS 69, art by Sal, words by Roy Thomas.

of them all is **Jack Kirby**. The things that he did with Stan — FANTASTIC FOUR, THOR and the rest — are the standard of the industry, even today. I think **John Buscema** is a tremendous storyteller, and his strength is his beautiful drawing. His drawing ability enhances his storytelling because he is able to do so much more with his characters — he's able to give them more character. One of the more recent guys that I'm an admirer of is **Walt Simonson**. He's not only a tremendous talent, but — this may sound a little weird — he's a tremendous comic-book talent. I think there are guys in the business today who are great talents, but I'm not so sure that they are good *comic-book* talents.

BRIAN: *Walt is also a fan.*

SAL: Oh, yeah. I was talking to Walt just yesterday. He exudes enthusiasm for what he's doing — he just bubbles over with it, and it's catching. You can see why his work is so vibrant — it's because he puts his all into his work. Another guy who is one of the unsung heroes in the business — and you don't see his work any more, because he's into other things for Marvel — one of my all-time favorites, and again I preface this by saying, great *comic-book* illustrators, is **John Romita**. John, to me, is the essence of the comic-book illustrator — what one should be. He draws beautifully. I wish I could draw girls the way he can. Marvelous storyteller. He could do pretty much what he wanted with the figure. John is, as far as I know, never mentioned with the all-time greats like **Kirby** and **Kubert**, and I think he should be — he belongs there. I don't know how much of a fan favorite he was, but commercially, he was outstanding. There is a difference there, and I'll use myself as an example.

As far as I know, I've never been a fan favorite like **John Byrne**, for example. I understand all the guy has to do is put a line on a piece of paper, and people run out to buy it. **John Buscema** has never been a fan favorite, and it's strange, because of the work that he's done on CONAN, and the work that he did on the SILVER SURFER. I can't remember looking at one of his jobs and saying, "This is a lousy job." He has never really been a fan favorite, but he has been a commercially successful artist. This is true of me. There are some artists who are not fan favorites but, like me, are reasonably successful commercially — I guess that's why Marvel has kept me around. One of the books that people didn't think would last is ROM. They thought it would last a year, like the toy did. I can't take sole credit — **Bill Mantlo** has done a terrific job writing the book. It's

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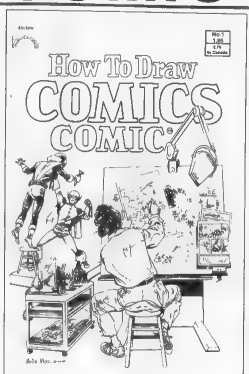

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CORRECTION: The HOW TO DRAW COMICS COMIC was mistakenly identified as John Byrne's HOW TO DRAW COMICS COMIC in two previous advertisements in this magazine. Although John Byrne contributed a tremendous amount of material to the HOW TO DRAW COMICS COMIC, including the remarkable and amusing cover shown above, he is not the book's author. We regret any inconvenience this may have caused.

"I've had a lot of not-so-good inkers."

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a combination of things that makes a book successful commercially.

BRIAN: *You recently left the HULK. Was that your decision?*

SAL: Yes, I thought it was about time. I still love the character.

BRIAN: *Was it a hard decision to make?*

SAL: Very hard, but I think nine years is an awfully long time to spend on one character.

BRIAN: *Was leaving ROM also your decision?*

SAL: Yes, and again it was just time for a change. I had been doing ROM for five years — again, an awfully long time.

BRIAN: *When you work on a book or a character for as long as you did those, do you find yourself getting into a rut as far as layout and design are concerned?*

SAL: That's always a danger.

BRIAN: *How do you get around it?*

SAL: I don't know. It just happens. You get into a rut, and you have to work out of it. It's like a baseball player getting out of a slump. They say the best way to get out of it is to keep swinging the bat until you break out of it. That's what you have to do — work and psyche yourself up. What usually triggers it is that, sooner or later, a plot will come along and you'll get enthusiastic and say, "Hey, this is going to be fun to illustrate!" And it suddenly stimulates new ideas and new pictures.

BRIAN: *I imagine it was quite different drawing an intelligent Hulk?*

SAL: Yes, it was. It was a situation that was enjoyable for a few issues, although I didn't particularly care for it. I think it lasted too long, and I was getting into a rut on it because I felt that I wasn't illustrating the Hulk anymore. He was just a big green guy with a lot of strength, and that's not the Hulk. The Hulk has a personality, and it's one of rage and simple-mindedness.

BRIAN: *I've read that John Byrne will be doing the Hulk the way he was in the six original issues of the series.*

SAL: I'm glad to hear that, because that's how the Hulk is supposed to be.

BRIAN: *Over the years, you have had a lot of inkers work on your pencils. Do you have any preference as to the style?*

SAL: Not so much the style — what I have a preference for is a good inker. *(Laughter.)* To be blunt, I've had a lot of not-so-good inkers on my work, and I think it's hurt me, personally. There are a lot of circumstances involved, and I can't really go into them now because it would take too long. It's been one of the problems in the industry, and it's every penciller's desire to have a good inker on his work.

BRIAN: *Are there enough to go around?*

SAL: In my opinion — no. **Gerry Talaoc**, who has inked my recent HULK issues, is a very good inker. I think the criterion there is that a good inker has to be a good draftsman, and that's why he's such a good inker — because he can draw. Any inker that inks well over someone else's pencils does so because he himself knows how to draw.

BRIAN: *Klaus Janson is a good example of that.*

SAL: Yes, he is. The greatest inker in the world is **Rudy Nebres**. He can take the worst penciller going and make him look like **Michelangelo**. That's because he's such a brilliant draftsman, himself. The only problem is that his inking is so overpowering that it doesn't look like the penciller's work anymore — it looks like Rudy's work. That's even true when he inks **John Buscema**'s work! When Rudy inks it, the only thing that tells me that it's John's work is the attitude of the figures. But being a good draftsman is what it's all about. Let me explain. Take **John Buscema** — and I seem to keep going back to him, because he's such a good draftsman. His work is particularly difficult to ink because his drawing is such that, if a guy is not almost as good a draftsman as John, it's easy to lose his drawings. I'm not sure if that's clear to the layman, but this is what happens: An inker can go off a hair on my drawings, and it's not that critical. If he goes off a hair on John's, then it *is* critical, and he's lost the drawing. This is why in many cases his work has suffered.

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SO I PAID VERY CLOSE ATTENTION TO DR. STRANGE DAMPER'S DREAMS...
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"Comics should reflect Judeo-Christian values."

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The only one that does his work justice is himself.

My work is more stylized - more on the cartoony side. That's not a very good term, but it is understandable. It's not as realistic as John's or Rudy's or **Joe Kubert**'s — it leans more **Jack Kirby**'s. At least, that's how I like to work, although I have worked more realistically. I'm able to do that when I do a CONAN or a KULL.

BRIAN: *There's been quite a bit said recently about the excessive violence and semi-sexual content in some comics. Do you think a ratings system should be adopted?*

SAL: No, I think those things should be eliminated. I don't mind saying that at all. I abhor them. We have to keep in mind that our primary audience is still youngsters. They're the ones shelling out whatever these books cost, keeping us in business, and I think we have a responsibility to them. Personally speaking, I can't stand the absolutely outrageous violence and explicit sex that is portrayed in movies today, which we are seeing more of on TV, and which is unfortunately creeping into comic books. There's nothing in movies that appeals to me: I don't like to see blood gushing, and I don't like pornography — I think it's a debasement of humanity. Most movies today are rated R, and I don't consider them entertainment. I guess that's what the public wants, and that's unfortunate.

BRIAN: *You have to figure there's a market for them, or they wouldn't keep making them.*

SAL: Right. And it's unfortunate. I think it says something, and I hate to see it happening to my industry. I personally would not do it. There is violence in the comics that I do, but it is not blatantly graphic violence. I'm doing an eight-page Conan story that **Larry Hama** asked me to do for the black-and-white book, and it was explained to me that we can be a little more explicit than we can in the color books. Well, I have no intention of being explicit.

BRIAN: *You've mentioned to me that you and your family are quite active in your church, and I was wondering what your thoughts are on how religion is presented in comics?*

SAL: Such as?

BRIAN: *Well, Nightcrawler is portrayed as a devout Catholic, Kitty Pryde is Jewish, and Wolverine is an Atheist. Other than that, not much is mentioned as far as beliefs of the characters, or expressions of any type of faith. Do you think that things should stay that way, or should religion be explored further, or a balance of faiths be represented?*

SAL: Wow. We're getting into something pretty heavy there. I think, generally speaking, what bothers me — and I won't really be answering your question — I don't know if it's essential to show a balance. I don't know if it's essential to have one character a Catholic, and another to be Jewish. Is that what you mean by a balance?

BRIAN: *More or less. Do you think that having a character that is an Athe st might have some people saying that that's a bad representation of how someone's attitudes should be?*

SAL: I believe comic books should be a reflection of Judeo-Christian values. I don't think that I can get more pointed than that. By that I don't mean that every character should be a saint, you still have to have that comic-book flavor. It seems to me that in so many of the books there is an emphasis on humanistic values. I don't know if you are familiar with the Humanist philosophy, but it is essentially atheistic. Again, I emphasize that we are appealing to a predominately young audience — we have kids buying comics, and I don't want to be the kind of influence on a kid that some rock stars or movie stars are. I don't want to be that kind of an adverse influence on a kid, I want to be a positive influence. That's what I mean when I say I hate some of the things that are happening to comic books today. I'm glad to see that it's not prevalent in Marvel and DC books, but some of these others I have seen — I saw one story that was so violent and sexually explicit that if we had a rating system, it would have been rated X, and I think that's wrong because you have impressionable youngsters looking at these things and they shouldn't be subjected to them.

This page: Pencil art by Sal for THE ETERNALS Marvel mini-series to be written by Peter B. Gillis.

© 1983 MCG

SAL BUSCEMA

"Sure we have a seamy side of life, but

They're getting a view of life that's not really true, and that's what I object to. Sure we have a seamy side of life, but why do we always have to concentrate on it? Why not focus on the positive side a little bit more?

BRIAN: *Let's do that and try to lighten things up a bit.*

SAL: Please do! *(Laughter.)*

BRIAN: *This is your first interview isn't it?*

SAL: I've done a couple for small fan magazines, but nothing of any consequence, so I hope this issue sells a lot.

BRIAN: *COMICS INTERVIEW always does — Stan reads them all.*

SAL: He's going to love my remarks about the Silver Surfer. Don't get mad at me, Stan. I apologize. *(Laughter.)*

BRIAN: *Are you a celebrity with the neighborhood kids?*

SAL: I don't know. My kids come home from school and tell me that they'll get into a conversation about comics, and they'll say "My dad works for Marvel," and other kids don't believe them until they show them the proof, so there is a certain amount of celebrity involved with the job. They ask for sketches, and I comply when I can. That part is fun, and it's something I'll never get used to.

BRIAN: *Any of your sons want to do comics?*

SAL: I don't really know. All three have developed characters that are more suited for syndicated strips. The ideas are good, but as to where they will go with them, I can't say.

BRIAN: *Up to this point, what do you think is the best work you have done?*

SAL: Honestly speaking, I think the work I've done recently is the best. You have not seen them yet, but we're doing an ETERNALS twelve-issue limited series, and I think the bottom line is that when you get compliments from your peers — that's the ultimate compliment.

BRIAN: *Who is writing and inking the book?*

SAL: Peter Gillis is writing it, and **Al Gordon** is inking it.

BRIAN: *What other projects are in the works?*

SAL: I did a DAREDEVIL that **Denny O'Neal** wrote and, if I'm not mistaken, it's the first time that I've worked from one of his plots. Denny being from the old school — he's not an old guy, just from the old school — his plot was very loose. The DAREDEVIL plot was only two pages, so that gave me plenty of freedom and I was able to expand on certain situations. It gave me an amount of freedom that I haven't experienced in some time. Some of the newer writers write very tight plots. I prefer the other way, although I can work from either. My goal is to give the writer what he wants. He has certain things in mind when he writes a story, and if you don't give him those things, then he's going to have problems writing it. I'm also working on a BALDER & KARNILLA limited series with **Walt Simonson**. He's writing it, and I will be doing the pencilling and inking.

BRIAN: *You don't do covers for the books you work on — why is that?*

SAL: I don't think they like my covers. *(Laughter.)* I don't know — it really doesn't matter to me. I think one of the problems is that the cover is very important to the book, and the editors want to have direct communication with the artist that will be doing the cover, and you can communicate only so much by phone. Covers are usually done by someone who is right there in the office. I think if I insisted on doing my covers, I could, but it really doesn't matter to me, as long as they get a good cover.

BRIAN: *What else do you enjoy doing when you're not at the drawing board?*

SAL: I enjoy performing in local amateur theatre. It's always been a love of mine, and I think that if I hadn't been an artist, I would have tried acting.

BRIAN: *Any favorite roles?*

SAL: Well, this is a recent thing with me. When I was in school I did a little bit of **Shakespeare** and a couple of **Gilbert** and **Sullivan** operettas and I loved it. Of course, when you get older, get drafted, get married,

PETER GILLIS says...

The Eternals. Wasn't that the **Kirby** superhero group that didn't sell the first time? Why would anybody want to revive them?

Well, I agree that the world doesn't necessarily need another superhero group. However, The Eternals were not a superhero group, and THE ETERNALS was one of the most fascinating ideas for a comic-book series to come down the pike in a long time. (Of course, I'd hardly expect less from **Jack Kirby**, one of the very few people I'd ever think of calling a comics genius.)

It dealt with larger-than-life characters in colorful costumes hammering out a new mythology, of course — all **Kirby** trademarks. But, while even his Fourth World series at DC polarized the world into good vs. evil, life vs. anti-life, THE ETERNALS brought The Gods down from the sky to put all those polarizations into question. Would The Gods find us Good or Evil? Would they judge us favorably or unfavorably — and should we abide by such a decision?

And following that theme, the characters were constantly defeating the reader's expectations. Ikaris, who at first looked like he was supposed to be the hero of the book, turns out to be thought of by the other Eternals as sort of a dumb jock — and turns out to be a Russian, on top of it all. Warlord Kro, seemingly decked out in full villain regalia at the beginning, turns out to be one of the most sympathetic, and even noble, characters in the book. And although the Deviants (how could one *not* buy a book with a bunch of characters called the Deviants?) were set up as ugly, awful, nasty and the sort who probably put cigarette holes in your sofa at parties — there was also a question that arose about their rage against the Space Gods and whether that might not be the right reaction.

The first issue of the book sent shivers up and down my spine, and the last issue made me depressed — because it was the last.

Marvel editors **Ralph Macchio, Mark Gruenwald** and I all shared enthusiasm for the series, and we vowed somehow to do something with it. Mark tried for a limited series, then a back up in WHAT IF? when he was editing the book, and we finally put together the 1983 IRON MAN ANNUAL. Then it was Ralph's turn, and he shot for the top: a 12-issue series — and we made it. The rest is (future) history.

A series which deals with the problem of Why Are We Here?; a series which involves

do we always have to concentrate on it?"

and raise a family, it kind of stays behind you and you put it off. Well, a few years ago I thought, "Why not take a crack at it just for fun and see what happens." So I've been doing it for three years, and I've done two shows — in **Thornton Wilder's** OUR TOWN I played the stage manager, and the other was I NEVER SANG FOR MY FATHER by **Robert Anderson.**

BRIAN: *Any parts that you would like to play?*

SAL: Oh yeah, zillions! Tevya in FIDDLER ON THE ROOF, Willy Lohman in DEATH OF A SALESMAN, THE KING AND I, and recently I auditioned for the part of Henry Higgins in MY FAIR LADY with the Arlington Players, but I didn't get the part because physically I don't fit it — I look too Italian. *(Laughter.)* Next Saturday I might audition for a part in TWELVE ANGRY MEN.

BRIAN: *That's an exciting play — I did it in high school. Before we call it quits, I've got a comic trivia question for you — who drew the last issue of the original X-MEN?*

SAL: Who?

BRIAN: *You.*

SAL: Really?

BRIAN: *Issue #66. It was the last issue featuring the original team, before the book went reprint. It featured the X-Men versus the Hulk in Las Vegas.*

SAL: That was the last one? I'll be darned. And now it's the hottest-selling book in the industry — and I had absolutely nothing to do with that. *(Laughter.)*

BRIAN: *Are you still having fun doing comics?*

SAL: I couldn't do it if I weren't. I'd also be lying if I said it wasn't a business. It's work. I don't leap into my studio with a grin on my face and pick up my pencil with eagerness and all sorts of anticipation — but I do enjoy it. So I guess if Marvel still wants me, I'll be around for another ten or fifteen years.

FOR THERE ARE THE CELESTIALS WHO, IN FOUR HOSTS, CAME TO EARTH, FOSTERED, NOURISHED, THEN CAST DOWN THE CREATURES CALLED MAN— IN ALL HIS FORMS, AND THEN, THEY WATCHED.
WE NO LONGER WONDERED WHO OUR PROGENITORS WERE — OR WHO WERE OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS. THE FOURTH HOST WALKED THE EARTH BEFORE OUR EYES — AND JUDGED US... YES, AND FOUND US WORTHY OF LIFE.
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the grand themes of Death and Immortality, of Love across the Abyss, and Defiance of the Gods; and a book which has immortals who, instead of just deciding to be heroic, have the option (being indestructible) of just having a good time. It's exactly the sort of thing that kept me charged up about comics, even during those periods of adolescence when it was Social Death to read Those Things. It's what Marvel Comics was always best at — and is something that, with a few exceptions such as **Walt Simonson's** THOR, has been largely lost.

Of course, whether the second incarnation of THE ETERNALS lives up to the promise of the first — and whether it catches on — I can't tell. But I'm happy I have an exceptional editor — to my mind, one of the best in the business — **Ralph Macchio,** who's just as determined to make this a great book as I am; and I'm working with **Sal Buscema,** who's doing the best work of his career on this series, and whose reinterpretation of the universe and the cast of characters Jack created is done with love and enthusiasm as well as unsurpassed skill.

If it falls on its face, then you know who to blame.

"My role in SWAMP THING is the Karen

My idea of what a female editor must look like stems from a memory of my 9th grade English teacher — very stern, very tall, peering squinty-eyed through Coke-bottle eyeglasses.

Needless to say, DC editor Karen Berger is nothing like that foreboding image, as you will soon see.

I was delighted that Karen was able to grant me this interview — I'd heard much about her from mutual acquaintances in the industry — all good. We met in her brownstone apartment in Manhattan's Upper West Side. Half expecting DC's larger than life replica of Clark Kent to greet me from her sofa, I was relieved to find her home was tastefully if more conservatively decorated in the modern style. It featured several prints by contemporary artists, and one by a shared favorite, the Fauvist artist, Matisse.

Nor was I disappointed in Karen herself — finding her to be both charming and articulate. So after swapping bits of industry gossip, and downing a quick supper of takeout Chinese food, we began the following discourse . . .

LESLEY BENJAMIN-AULL: *I am curious to know if you were interested in comics before you went to DC. Did you read them as a kid?*

KAREN BERGER: I read ARCHIE as every other girl did. I read the ROMANCE comics and TRUE CONFESSIONS when they were passed around sleep-away camp.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Karen Berger.
Born: 26 February 1958 — Brooklyn, NY. I'm a Pisces and an Amethyst — which is appropriate because I edit AMETHYST.
Favorite Holiday: Halloween.
Education: Brooklyn College — a Bachelors Degree in English Literature, and a minor in Journalism.
Favorite Comic Book Characters: Swamp Thing, Amethyst.
Favorite Writer Outside of Comics: F. Scott Fitzgerald.
Pet Peeves: Obnoxious, pompous freelancers.

LESLEY: *Around which camp?*

KAREN: Sleep-away camp. Outside of New York City they call it overnight camp but if you grew up in New York City, it's sleep-away camp. It's the same thing like the expression "sleeping late." People out of New York say, "I slept in." In Brooklyn you "slept late."

LESLEY: *In New Jersey, where I originate from, the phrase that identifies you as a local is, "going' down the shore." Going to any other beach in the world you say, "we are going to the beach" or "to the ocean" except in New Jersey!* (Laughter.)

KAREN: One of my brothers had comics around the house but only for a short time, then he stopped reading them. I wasn't interested in comics at all. I remember when **Marc DeMatteis**, who's a good friend of mine,was trying to break into the field, and he'd show me all of these weird mystery comics, I thought they were so strange. I never knew that comics like those ever existed. In retrospect it was really funny because for one of my journalism classes I had to interview someone with an interesting job, so it was Marc. The piece wasn't published, it was just for class. It shows you that I probably wasn't such a great interviewer because he told me the types of stories he was scripting , and I remember writing in the paper "supernatural westerns." It was really supernatural stories and westerns, but I didn't have a tape recorder, and obviously my notes weren't that clear.

LESLEY: *That's an idea for a new line.* (Laughter.)

KAREN: Right! But little did I know back then that I was going to get into this business. I wonder what my English professors would say now.

I didn't know anything about comics when I started working for **Paul Levitz**. He sent me home with big stacks of comics and I read them.

LESLEY: *Which ones were you reading then?*

KAREN: Just random DC titles. I read all the BATMAN books because Paul was the BATMAN editor, the TEEN TITANS, the mystery books — I always liked them.

KAREN BERGER

Code as opposed to the Comics Code."

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San Diego COMIC-CONvention, Inc.

COMICS INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE CONTACT: Clayton Moore

DATE: July 13, 1985 (619) 284-7147

Announcing a new special feature! The San Diego COMIC-CONvention and Comics Interview magazine are proud to present an exclusive series featuring material from the outstanding Comic Art Seminars!

The Comic Art Seminars are private courses given by top professionals in their respective fields, who donate their time and expertise to educating Comic-Con members, who include people aspiring to enter the comic industry along with fans and collectors seeking to enrich their understanding of and appreciation for the comic art medium ... which means just about everybody!

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COMICS INTERVIEW

"An editor provides emotional stability."

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Detail from HOUSE OF MYSTERY 300. Art by Kaluta.

LESLEY: *How and when did you get into comics?*

KAREN: I got into the comic field about five and a half years ago. I can't believe that it's been that long. I had just graduated from college and I was looking for a job in publishing and wanted some type of editorial position, eventually to be an editor. I also took a lot of art history courses — I'm very interested in that — and ultimately, at one point, thought I'd want to write or be an editor for ART IN AMERICA or ART FORUM — one of those "art" magazines. I went on a couple of interviews and I actually had an interview at a company that published soft core porn. I didn't know that until I got there. It was very strange.

LESLEY: *Did you turn down a job offer from them?*

KAREN: Actually, I came back for a second interview. It was narrowed down to three people out of a hundred and fifty, and I was one of the lucky, so she told me — the woman who was the managing editor.

LESLEY: *Are they still in business?*

KAREN: Yes. I've seen them on the stands. I didn't get the job. I wouldn't have taken it if I did. I was going into it more for experience than anything else.

LESLEY: *You would have gotten experience, I'm sure.* (Laughter.)

KAREN: The experience of going on job interviews. But it was very amusing. Anyway **Marc DeMatteis**, was just breaking into writing comics at DC back then on the mystery books. He told me, "Hey, this guy, **Paul Levitz**, at DC needs an assistant. Why don't you give him a call?" So I did.

Paul interviewed me and I came back for a second interview with **Joe Orlando** and I got the job. And I've been very happy there since.

LESLEY: *I assume that Paul was more in the marketing area of DC than in the editorial area?*

KAREN: At that point, Paul was editorial coordinator. That is **Pat Bastienne**'s position now. He was also editor of the BATMAN books, DETECTIVE, BATMAN, BRAVE AND THE BOLD. He also did rights and permissions. He also did special projects. He handled business matters — contracts. He seemed to do about 5000 things! Obviously the company was a lot smaller then. But working for Paul exposed me to a lot of different areas in some small degree, and helped to broaden my horizons.

I was assistant editorial coordinator for about a year and a half and I became editorial coordinator when Paul became business manager — Manager of Business Affairs.

After I was working there for about six months, they gave me HOUSE OF MYSTERY to edit. I guess they wanted to see if this person could do anything editorially because they knew I could do something administratively. They saw I could I guess. I really enjoyed working on that title a lot.

I was editorial coordinator for about two and a half years, somewhere along the way I got the LEGION to edit, and then AMETHYST. Then HOUSE OF MYS-

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KAREN BERGER

"Being an editor is being part therapist when you have to be, and part friend."

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TERY was cancelled, so I had the other two titles while I was editorial coordinator. Then I switched positions and became a full-time editor.

LESLEY: *How long ago was that?*

KAREN: About two years ago.

LESLEY: *A lot happened in those first three and a half years.*

KAREN: Yes. It was a good learning experience for me. There was a time a few years ago when I thought I might want to go the straight business route. I took a Stanley H. Kaplan course to prepare for the G.M.A.T.s to get an M.B.A.

But the day of the test I said, "I don't want to do this!" I questioned whether I really wanted to go to school at night for five years. But at this point, I don't.

LESLEY: *Tell me what an editor actually does?*

KAREN: One of *those* questions, huh? An editor's role or what an editor does?

LESLEY: *I tend to think that there is more than one job description for what an editor does. What is your perception of what he or she* should *do?*

KAREN: Technically, an editor will plot the story with a writer, will buy the story, will give it to the artist, will give it to the letterer and the colorist, will work on the cover design — will do the whole run — will edit the scripts when they come in — or not edit the scripts if they don't have to be edited. To me, being an editor means looking at what book you have and looking at the creative people involved and seeing if you like what they're doing. If you agree with their specific vision, and you think it's the right direction for the book, and if the creative team is doing everything right, then there's little that you're going to have to do.

That's the feeling I have with SWAMP THING and with the LEGION. Paul, I think, knows the LEGION better than anyone in the world, except maybe for some hard core fans. The same thing with Alan on SWAMP THING. It's his specific vision, and Steve and John's, too, to some degree. I agree with what they're doing most of the time, and they'll hear when I don't and things will be adjusted. But overall, they've really got a handle on it, which is nice. It's good to be able to sit back and not have to get intensively creatively involved. Not that I don't like to — I love the creative involvement — but if the people are getting all together on their own, then they don't need much from me. An editor is there to guide and to direct and if it is being well-directed by the involved talent, then it's just fun for me. I think an editor also provides good emotional stability between the different people working on the book — a mood or something.

A lot of being an editor is getting along well with the people that you're working with and making sure that they are relatively happy — being part therapist when you have to be — and part friend.

"Comics are male power fantasies. There's

LESLEY: *To the artistic temperment — assuming there is one?*

KAREN: Yes, to that. Of course there is.

LESLEY: *To what extent do you get into the work from the start — getting involved in it interior creation? Plotting, designing, artwork?*

KAREN: From the very beginning. I get more involved on some books than others. AMETHYST being one, and most recently with ARION. I had a big role in terms of the plotting and development in both books — especially with AMETHYST. Even though it was created before I got the series, I really helped to steer the title a certain way. I tried to make it more of a fantasy comic which girls might like. Didn't totally succeed in many ways.

LESLEY: *You worked with Ernie Colon on that?*

KAREN: Yes. When I got the assignment it was essentially four guys doing a sword and sorcery comic. It happened to have a female star, but they weren't treating her as though she were a female. They were treating her as though she were merely wearing a skirt.

LESLEY: *A male character in a female costume?*

KAREN: Well, in some ways. It's hard for many men to write a female character. I think that **Dan Mishkin** and **Gary Cohn** have written AMETHYST well, but at the beginning, they needed a little push in the right direction. As Dan said at the end of a letter column, "Karen is the only one who's had any experience at being a thirteen-year-old girl." I should hope so! *(Laughter.)*

LESLEY: *Do you think that the editor who edits best, edits least?*

KAREN: No, not necessarily. It depends on the people tht you're working with. Again with ARION, I edited a lot. And with AMETHYST, I edit a lot. But on SWAMP THING and the LEGION, I don't have to edit much. In terms of cover ideas, though, I work closely with all the artist for all of my books.

On the actual story ideas, I ask Alan for six month overviews on SWAMP THING, and the same thing with Paul. I read them over, and we talk about the various ideas and storylines. The scripts or plots come in basically sound, and I spend a good deal of time calling up certain artists and yelling at them for being late — you people know who you are! It's nice to have a couple of books where I agree very much with what the creative team is doing.

It's good to have those — but I wouldn't want all my titles like that. I really like to heavily participate in the creative development. But if I don't have to, I don't have to. And I do in small ways as well. As the saying goes, "If it ain't broke, don't fix It!"

One thing that I like about my editing assignments is that I just happened to get books that are all "off-*genre*" — not super-hero books.

LESLEY: *Is that a technical industry term, "off-genre"?*

KAREN: I don't know if it's technical, but we use it at DC, at least I do.

LESLEY: *Sounds good, I like it.*

KAREN: Comics are basically super-hero oriented — Marvel more than DC. But DC puts out more of a variety of comics than Marvel. This is something that David will probably use as a callout for this interview. But it's true! We do. I think that's great. I think that we need more diversity in our product.

I personally don't like super-heroes that much. I like the LEGION a lot because the characters are atypical, super-heroes in a futuristic, science fictional, soap opera environment. Paul has done such a wonderful job of making real characters out of twenty-four of these people — that's just team members, not to mention loads of villains. I don't consider LEGION a real super-hero book, even though I know that it is one. I like it, but I don't know if I'd want to edit too many super-hero titles.

I like fantasy, sword and sorcery, horror, whatever SWAMP THING is. I guess people classify it as that.

LESLEY: (Misunderstanding) *You like what?*

KAREN: Horror. H-O-R-R-O-R.

LESLEY: *Oh! Hor-ror. The Horror, the horror, oh, the horror! This is New Jersey talking to New York.*

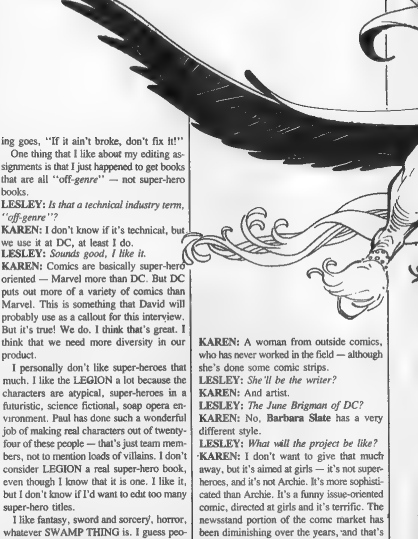
KAREN: To Brooklyn! I say it very strangely. Anyway, I'm also working on a book for the girls' market.

LESLEY: *Really? Is this inside information or has it already come out in the press?*

KAREN: I think it has been mentioned casually in some magazines.

LESLEY: *Who will be working on it?*

AMETHYST ala artist Ernie Colon.



KAREN: A woman from outside comics, who has never worked in the field — although she's done some comic strips.

LESLEY: *She'll be the writer?*

KAREN: And artist.

LESLEY: *The June Brigman of DC?*

KAREN: No, **Barbara Slate** has a very different style.

LESLEY: *What will the project be like?*

KAREN: I don't want to give that much away, but it's aimed at girls — it's not super-heroes, and it's not Archie. It's more sophisticated than Archie. It's a funny issue-oriented comic, directed at girls and it's terrific. The newsstand portion of the comc market has been diminishing over the years, and that's now our only outlet to reach the "average" girl. About 90% of all comic-book readers are male and I think it's about time for a change. We want to get the "average girl" to read comics because she doesn't now. I know that I stopped reading comics when —

LESLEY: *You outgrew Archie.*

KAREN: Yes, there was nothing else for me to read. And the thought of me picking up a comic was — well, let's just say I would never have read one. I didn't know any girls who read comics when I was twelve and up. But if I did, I would look at them,askance. You know, girls grow up so much earlier than boys. When you're thirteen, you're into

nothing for a girl to be interested in."

make-up and jewelry and clothing and boys.
LESLEY: *But they aren't interested in us.* (Laughter.).
KAREN: Of course, they don't know what girls are. The thought of reading comics, which is what girls associate with childhood — what they're trying to get away from desperately — is beyond them. But I think that if they had something to read that interested them — a little more sophisticated and geared toward them, they'd really like it. There has really never been anything in this medium like that. So hopefully with this property, we will open up the market. It takes a lot of chances, and I think it has everything going for it.
LESLEY: *Let me just interject: why do you think that women, young girls, are not as interested in super-heroes? Why do super-heroes appeal to boys rather than girls?*
KAREN: Because super-heroes fight and beat the bad guys. I think it's just the way boys and girls are brought up in our society. Girls fight, definitely, but —
LESLEY: *Not physically as much?*
KAREN: Yes, physically. But not as much.
LESLEY: *In Brooklyn?*
KAREN: Yes, in Brooklyn *(Laughter.)* No, not me. The tough girls did. I wasn't a tough girl. I definitely was *not* a tough girl. No, comics were never really geared to girls. Even Wonder Woman, even though she's a female, never quite make it to the girl reader. Comics are basically boy-male-power fantasies. Boys are "supposed" to fight — look at contact sports — again, it's the whole way that they're brought up. I think because girls mature earlier than boys they want more out of a comic. They'll read Archie, but Archie doesn't really deliver, and the girls outgrow it real fast. It's strange, because girls, even when they're little, want to have babies and usually play with dolls a lot. It's rare to see a boy pretending to have a baby. Girls, from the time they're very small, are geared towards being a mother. Which is so bizarre! Actually, those stereotypes are being fought against today — but when I was growing up, they were the norm. Anyway, there's nothing in comics for a girl to be interested in. Archie provides the boyfriend-girlfriend dating kind of thing. If comics were more realistic, without super-heroes, I think girls would like them better.
LESLEY: *Since I'm on this feminism issue — I'll just go for it. Why do think there are so few women in the higher ranks — in the more creative ranks in comics right now? At DC, there's just you and Janice Race as editors, as well as a few at Marvel, and not many as writers or artists.*
KAREN: There are a lot more women now working on staff than when I first came to DC. Back then there was **Jenette Kahn** and **Laurie Sutton** and a few women in production and the front office, and that was it. Now at DC, we have many women in executive business positions. In terms of creative positions, there's Janice and myself, and **Barbara Randall** who's an associate editor, and **Pat Bastienne**. But in terms of the freelance community, there are not too many women.

But there are a lot more than there used to be. I think, when first started working here the only creative women in the field were **Marie Severin** and **Ramona Fraydon.** Ramona was doing SUPER FRIENDS; she draws BRENDA STARR now, and **Louise Jones**, and that was it! Forgive me, anyone out there for forgetting them. There were also fewer women coloring and lettering then.
LESLEY: *There are a few women in the alternatives, too.*
KAREN: Right. And there are a number of artists: **Jan Duursema, Cara Sherman, June Brigman, Mary Wilshire**... but it's true when you think about it, there aren't a lot of women in this field. And I think there should be more.
LESLEY: *Well, if the medium isn't geared for women, how and why will they get into it?*
KAREN: That's exactly right. There's nothing for them. Maybe if comics were geared toward girls, you'd have more women creatively active in the business. In terms of mainstream writers, there's **Mindy Newell, Louise Simonson** and **Ann Nocenti.**

Actually, I wish there were more women. I do think that having women editors is a step in the right direction. I think the fact that I, Janice and even **Alan Gold** came in from outside comics is also a plus.
LESLEY: *Why?*
KAREN: I think you bring in a fresh approach. Not that people who have read comics their entire lives are stale and predictable, but any means, and not that they don't expose themselves to other forms of literature, which they do — more than most people do. But I think when you're coming into comics, not as a fan — you see it for what it is — you're not associating it with your

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THE COMICS JOURNAL #100

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(believe it or not)

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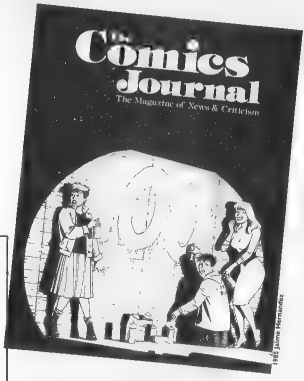

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"Boys don't like women with green skin."

childhood, with what you could have done with a character then if only you were the writer or the editor. I think it's healthy to bring in people with more objectivity.

LESLEY: *Another question I have about women is that some of the least commercially successful characters in comics are characters like Wonder Woman, Supergirl, She-Hulk. Why do you think that's the case?*

KAREN: Because boys are buying those comics. Boys — well, a lot of boys, anyway — don't like women with green skin Boys don't want to see really powerful girls. They want to see themselves powerful. They can't identify with these female characters, so the books don't sell well. They need their role-models and that's what male super-heroes provide for them. They can't relate to this strong woman running around with green skin. She might be attractive and have a sexy costume, which I'm sure the little boys just love, as well as the people drawing them.

LESLEY: *Maybe that's who they're really for!* (Laughter.)

KAREN: I think so! Basically men have been writing the women characters and a lot of men just don't know how to write them realistically.

LESLEY: *Can women write about women better?*

KAREN: I think women are more intuitive than most men, and may write about relationships better. Yes, I think women write about women better than men write about women in comics. There's some men who do it well — some that work with me that do it well, and some that don't work with me that do it well. But I think that the majority of female characters, especially over the years, just weren't handled well. Why would any girl want to read about a Wonder Woman who could really be a man?

LESLEY: *So you lose sales both ways, with the boys who are not interested in a girl role-model and girls who are not interested in a "male-written" female.*

KAREN: Yes.

LESLEY: *I'll buy it. It is as good an argument as I've ever heard.*

KAREN: The question was why don't girls read comics?

LESLEY: *No. I was interested in those particular characters and why they weren't marketing successes.*

KAREN: I think they weren't handled well either.

LESLEY: (Whispers.) *Don't say that! You are giving fuel to the Amy Sacks/Barry Dutter SHE-HULK-anti-SHE-HULK wars in our LOC column.*

KAREN: I take it back! I take it back! *(Laughter.)*

LESLEY: *An editor usually comes from some field of writing, maybe he or she was an English major in college. How do you think that skill translates when you have to give an artist direction?*

KAREN: It doesn't necessarily

LESLEY: *Was it a problem for you learning about what makes good comic book art?*

KAREN: No, not at all. I was always interested in art anyway, so maybe that's why it wasn't really that hard for me. I just read a lot of comics, talked to a lot of people about what a good storyteller does — and the different ways to relate a story through pictures. I also just kind of figured it out on my own — and then I have my own personal favorites

Amethyst triumphant:
From the cover of issue 12.

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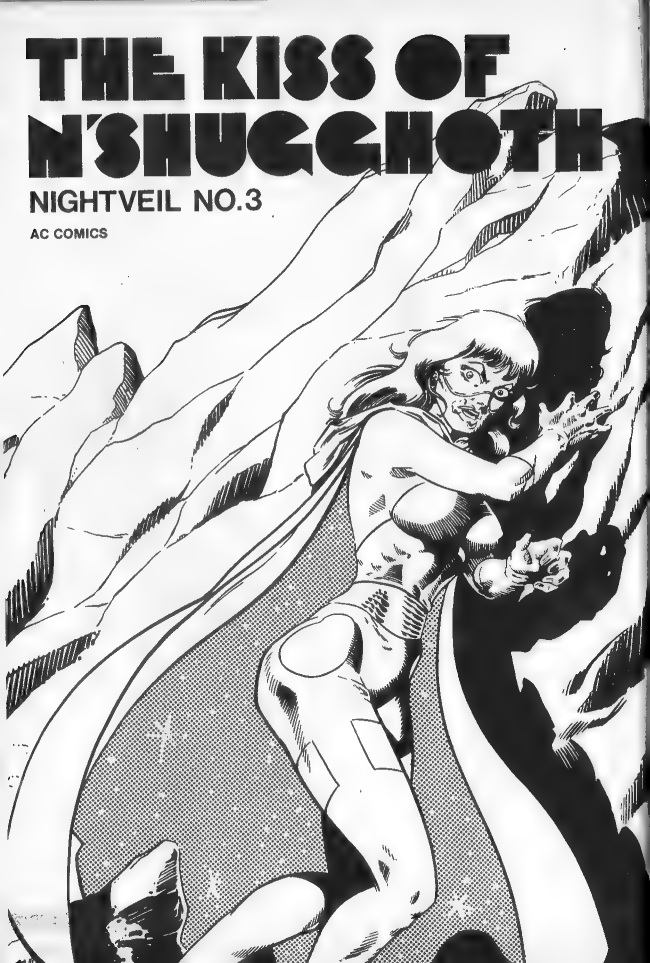

"SWAMP THING sales have increased 60%."

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and biases. But no, it wasn't a problem for me at all. I just happened to have an eye for art, I guess.

Many artists draw pretty pictures, but they can't tell a story to save their lives. A lot of people don't draw pictures that well but are great storytellers, and yet both can still do well and become fan favorites — that's great. Storytelling is half the battle in this medium. Of course you have to know how to draw, but you don't have to be technically perfect. Some people are wonderful illustrators but their storytelling puts you to sleep. You have to be able to make a story move among other things.

LESLEY: *What does an editor look for when you evaluate a story in terms of style, storytelling and artwork. How do you evaluate what is good?*

KAREN: What I like.

LESLEY: *What you personally like, or what you think the market is going to like?*

KAREN: Both. Sometimes, if I think that there's something that the market won't like, but I like it, and my instincts say, "Hey, this is real good," maybe we'll go with a certain story. Maybe we won't. Editors are being paid for their taste and for their instincts, you have to bet on them. A good story to one person is not a good story to another. Technically, you have to have your basic requirements in the the story, of course, your plot, your conflict. A beginning, middle and end.

I like to know who the characters are, their deepest, innermost thoughts. I like to know their background, who their friends are, their family, I like to know all that stuff from reading the story. If I don't care about a character, the reader isn't going to, either. Yes, it is hard to flesh out a character in so few pages but there are certain ways to do that.

LESLEY: *Do you see your roll as editor to develop work in progress or are you out there searching for new properties? New artists, new writers — I am not talking about NEW TALENT SHOWCASE specifically. But do you see your role as having to always keep your antennaes up looking for new projects? Are you receptive if someone walks into your office cold and says, "I've got a great idea for you!"?*

KAREN: Oh sure I am, yes.

LESLEY: *And you can do something with that material? You are not just pigeon-holed into just working with existing properties?*

KAREN: Oh no, of course not. It really depends who you're working with. I am definitely open to new ideas if they're good ones.

LESLEY: *Do fans approach you at conventions or on the street? Do they try to burst into your office and say, "Miss Berger, will you buy this?"*

Art from SWAMP THING 28: "Not something you'd want a young kid to read."

KAREN: They don't come upstairs, but they do come up to me at conventions.

LESLEY: *Tom Condon made a big point in his interview with Dwight Zimmerman of saying, "we* love *it when people come up to us." I am not sure how much that is true.*

KAREN: It's fun going to a convention and having people ask for your autograph. I just don't know why they want *my* autograph.

LESLEY: *Maybe you will be an important figure in the history of comics someday! Or maybe directly after this interview hits the stands!* (Laughter.) *Or maybe you are important to their favorite characters right now.*

KAREN: Yes, I think that's true. Especially with the Legion and Swamp Thing. But that's all right. I'm not proud! *(Laughter.)*

LESLEY: *You are the former editor of NEW TALENT SHOWCASE.*

KAREN: One of many. It was a very tough book to edit.

LESLEY: *Why was it so much tougher than any of the others?*

KAREN: Well, the size for one thing. It was double-sized at 48 pages. Before it was cancelled, I believe, it was 32 pages. But that's really the least of it. You're working monthly with newcomers, and it's very time consum-

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"You have to know the rules before you break them."

ing. Besides the fact that you have to look at all of these submissions that come in — actually **Sal Amendola** who's now talent coordinator and another former editor of NEW TALENT SHOWCASE did the initial screening. Sal would weed the stuff out — 'cause you'd get thousands and thousands of submissions — but he still gave you piles of things to look at. Then if you found someone with a good idea for a story you'd send them the guidelines for writing a plot, and constructing a script. We're talking weeks back and forth in the mail, here. I worked full-script with everybody. I feel that you have to know the rules before you can break them, and the only way to learn them is to write full-script.

So you're dealing with all these people, and you're teaching them the basics of writing or drawing comics.

You might see a plot that's interesting and then you'd work with a person getting a story together, and you'd see that though they have good ideas, they can't write. Then, all that time is wasted. Or, you can team them up with a person who's a good dialoguer. If you live in the New York area, it's the best way to break in, especially as a writer. For an artist it's a little easier to live anywhere else. We've gotten some artists from the New Talent Showcase program who never came to New York. They've come to New York since, like **Steve Lightle** who was most recently drawing the LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES — who **Roger Slifer** say I stole from WORLD'S FINEST but I had him first! *(Laughter.)*

LESLEY: *You admit it!*

KAREN: I had him first on NEW TALENT SHOWCASE, so I was just taking him back to where he started! Steve worked with Roger on WORLD'S FINEST and then when LEGION was in need of an artist — LEGION is the second-best selling monthly DC book — I didn't force him to take the assignment, it was his decision. I just offered it to him.

LESLEY: *Who else did you discover?*

KAREN: I hate to use the word "discover." Ummm . . .

LESLEY: *This is the Schwab Drugstore Story.* (Laughter.)

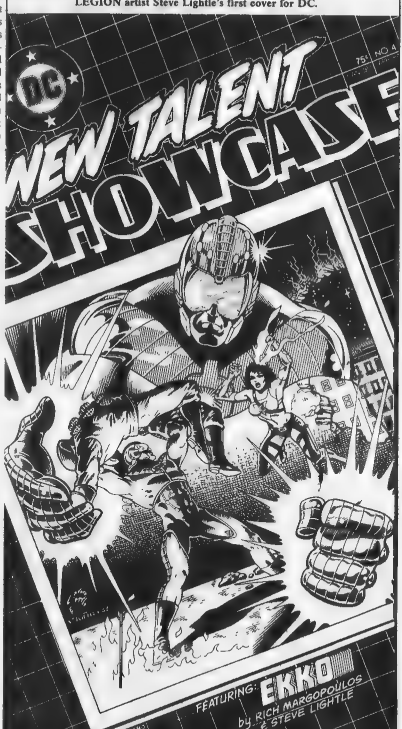
KAREN: Terry Shoemaker was doing the TALES OF THE LEGION for a while but left because he wanted to do some stuff for Marvel. I thought he was a promising artist. **Karl Kesel**, who inked TALES OF THE LEGION for the whole run and is now inking AMETHYST regularly over **Ernie Colon**'s pencils, is very talented and a professional, which is hard to find.

LESLEY: *He acts professionally?*

KAREN: He's very reliable when it comes to deadlines. He's extremely skilled as well. It's usually hard to find the two together, but you can pin Karl down to a time, the date and the hour. So it's great, you can always count on him.

Mindy Newell is writing WONDER WOMAN, she wrote a whole run of TALES

LEGION artist Steve Lightle's first cover for DC.



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"Editors are paid for their taste and

OF THE LEGION stories, and she's doing a LOIS LANE mini-series as well. There's **Stan Woch** who **Roger Slifer** brought in, I believe, who did WORLD'S FINEST for a while, and an issue of SWAMP THING. Who else? I'm sure that I'm forgetting someone very major at this point.

LESLEY: *That sounds like quite a nice group to have exposure for the first time.*

Let me couch this question. Being a would-be writer myself I feel that a new artist's or new writer's ego is very tied up in their work. I've heard David Kraft complain that a new writer will feel that once he sets a word down that it is impaled in stone. They don't want to change. They think they know everything. How do you deal with the ego, without stamping out their faith in themselves? How do you control the erratic ego of a new writer? Do you know what I am talking about?

KAREN: Oh yes! *(Laughter.)* Or the erratic ego of an experienced writer or artist? You just basically have to be honest with them. But specifically, with the new talent, most of them will change something — I mean, you *are* teaching them how to do this stuff. The only way they're gong to learn is if they're willing to take criticism. The ones that haven't been able to take criticism — and there were a number of people on NEW TALENT SHOWCASE who couldn't — aren't working anywhere else in the field because of their attitude.

LESLEY: *They just faded out of the scene?*

KAREN: Yes, you can't walk in there and think that because you've read a million comics that you know everything about the industry.

There was one artist I worked with who, besides taking three months to draw an eight-page story, was pretty much of a wise-guy. He wanted another assignment, and I said, "No!" I thought he had some potential, but he was very arrogant — which is something that I just cannot stand — especially when you don't have the proven talent to back it up. So, here was this new guy walking in, giving me all these reasons why he was so great. When I flatly said, "No, I don't want to give you any more work," and he asked, "Why?" — I told him, "Because of your attitude, and you think that you know everything." I told him that if he couldn't accept criticism, he'd find it very hard in life to work anywhere. He said, "If you want **George Perez**, I can draw like **Georgia Perez**." Where do people get the audacity to say things like that?

But not most of them are like that. I'd say that most of them — the New Talent people — are very willing and able to change. There's always one or two in every crowd — the people with the big egos. But they're always going to have those egos. Maybe they'll change — they'll get a little better — or they'll get out of the industry

If they're extremely, extremely talented, we might stick with them longer because of their potential. Otherwise, it's a waste of your time, and a waste of their time. Sometimes you do have to say to NEW TALENT people who have only wanted to write or draw comics all their life — that they just don't have it. You know a lot of people think that writing is so easy. But it's not. It's real hard. It's real hard to write an eight-page story.

In NEW TALENT, you're constantly stroking the egos of the people on the book because they really need it. It's a big thing to write comics, and takes a long time to get the hang of it.

LESLEY: *Let's talk about some of your other projects. SWAMP THING is getting so much attention. How long has it been around?*

KAREN: In this incarnation, issue #41 is coming out soon, so what's that, three years at least. **Alan Moore** really breathed new life into the character and the book. Sales and public response have thankfully reflected that. The three of them, Alan, Steve and John, just happened to have the strange perception of the character, which is rare for comics — that a writer and artists will think the same, especially when they're from two different countries.

LESLEY: *What is it like working with* **Alan Moore**?

KAREN: It's fun.

LESLEY: *Do you talk to him regularly on the phone?*

KAREN: Yes, and we flew him in last summer. And we are flying him in again for the San Diego Comicom this summer. We brought him in to meet us in New York last year. He went to a convention as well, and met **Stephen Bissette** and **John Totelben**. So I speak to Alan a couple of times a month over the phone. He's a very nice, warm person, besides being quite talented.

LESLEY: *How did he get involved in SWAMP THING? Did you bring him in?*

KAREN: No. **Len Wein** did. **Marty Pasko** was leaving the book and Len needed a new writer. Len had known Alan from his British work but **Paul Levitz** claims that *he's* the one that told Len about Alan and Len never seems to remember that story. So it depends on who you ask. *(Laughter.)* But Len actually gave him the assignment. Len worked with Alan on his first four issues and then I got the book with issue #25. I've had it for about a year and a half.

LESLEY: *And the sales have increased?*

KAREN: Yes. Direct sales have increased about 60%. It's nice to see a book that's not super-hero or mutant-oriented doing so well. I think it can do a lot better too if those "mutant" readers would turn their attention to it.

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instincts, you have to bet on them."

LESLEY: *Is it an older crowd than the super-hero fans that read it?*

KAREN: We think so. It's meant to be, at least. It's not for a ten or eleven-year-old kid, but perhaps for thirteen and up. We decided not to send it through the Comics Code anymore because we felt that the stories Alan was doing were geared to older readers. It's not something that you'd want a young kid to read. They're scary.

LESLEY: *Do you get scared?*

KAREN: Sometimes I take scripts home and read them at night and, yes, I get scared!

LESLEY: *I understand that his writing is very moody?*

KAREN: Yes, you could say that. Alan's also one of the few writers out there who still writes full-script. Sometimes, an individual panel description will be two pages long. He describes the image so clearly that he writes down everything from where the characters are to the sunlight streaming through three strands of hair.

LESLEY: *How do the artists feel about that much control from the writer?*

KAREN: Alan is very humble. He'll give all these details and then at the end he'll say, "If all this makes absolutely no sense to you, then do whatever you want!"

Yes, an artist might be intimidated by all this input, but his art directions are so amusing themselves, they're just fun to read. Steve takes a lot of what Alan suggests, but then doesn't always. I think that's what makes the book work so well.

LESLEY: *You don't feel that you gave the book that much direction?*

KAREN: No. It was on its way. I'm there to make sure that it stays that way and to make sure that it doesn't get a little too gory. Alan, Steve and John really have the tendency — tendency, I should say they'd *love* to put all these disgusting things in the book. I say, "No, guys. You can't do this. It's still a comic book." Alan, Steve and John are three very mild mannered men who have these very manical sides to them.

John told me that he grew up near a slaughter-house, and Steve said he used to dissect flies and country rodents, so I guess that explains their interests, right?

Anyway, I would say that my biggest role in SWAMP THING is to make sure that the guys don't get too carried away with themselves. It's the "Karen Code" as opposed to the Comics Code.

LESLEY: *Sounds like otherwise they'd run amuck.*

KAREN: They do try to sneak things in. But they're better than they used to be. *(Laughter.)*

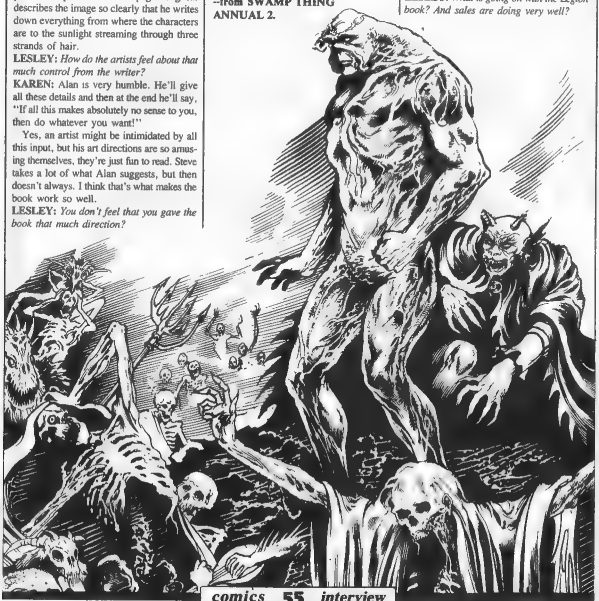
As far as Alan goes, though he certainly has gotten a lot of well deserved attention lately. It's great because the artist is the one who gets noticed for turning a book around. This time a writer has done it, and people are realizing it. He's very talented, charming, intelligent, and humble.

LESLEY: *He's not going to be so humble after he reads this!* (Laughter.)

KAREN: He's really one of the humblest people that I've met.

LESLEY: *What is going on with the Legion book? And sales are doing very well?*

More Bissette & Totleben art --from SWAMP THING ANNUAL 2.



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"I personally don't like superheroes that much."

KAREN: Yes

LESLEY: *What do you think of the direction that book is taking?*

KAREN: I'm really excited about what we're doing. People always say, "I'm real excited." That's such a typical thing to say, but it's true. I am

LESLEY: *I can edit out every other "real."* (Laughter.)

KAREN: We just introduced five great new Legionaires — a human and alien mix. Saturn Girl, Lightning Lad, and Cosmic Boy, the three founding members resigned a couple of months ago — to make way for the rookies. I think adding new blood is vital to any book's success. And we've brought in some intriguing characters this time around. LEGION #17 is a starting point issue, designed to be accessible for a person that always wanted to read the Legion but was afraid to because of it incredible continuity an cast of thousands. People look at the LEGION and say, "I can't read this book!" It's worse than coming into DYNASTY or DALLAS — except that it 's written a lot better. Especially better than DYNASTY. I can't believe that they get away with that stuff.

Anyway, not only do you have twenty-four Legionnaires, but there's the recently disbanded Substitute Heroes, the Reservists, all these villains and many different worlds, races and civilizations.

LESLEY: (Incredulously) *How did you learn all this history?*

KAREN: It was real hard. When I first got the book it was like, "What *is* this?" It was a real education.

LESLEY: *Learning the origins must have been horrific!*

KAREN: Oh, yes. But they're great! I think that's why the book has lasted so long and has a fan following that's enormous. I'm sure it must be as big as the X-MEN or the TEEN TITANS. I think the Legion is attractive because of its complexity. That's why team books are so successful. Readers like a lot of people and they like to know all about

This page: Who are the new Legionaires?
Next page: LEGION art by Giffen & Kessel.

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STORY BY KEN MITCHRONEY MARK CANTRELL

ART BY KEN MITCHRONEY

"DC puts out more of a variety than Marvel."

them. Even in the years when the Legion was not written or drawn as well as it is now, the fans still bought it. And that's one thing you can't say about too many books.

The Legion sells very well, but I know that a lot of people don't read it because there's no place to jump in and I can see why. But we're gong to provide a starting point and hopefully people will come in, like it, and stay. I think it offers everything that you find in other team books — and more. There's really no other book like it around. It's really a science-fiction soap opera — and a very well crafted one at that.

LESLEY: *AMETHYST. What is going on with that?*

KAREN: **Ernie Colon** is back drawing the book as of issue #9 — and many dramatic changes are in store for Amethyst and her worlds.

LESLEY: *This book is a special favorite of yours because you were in on the evolution of it. How did that come about?*

KAREN: They gave me the book. *(Laughter.)* They said, "Do you want to edit AMETHYST?" I said, "Sure." I made it a book that I wanted to read.

LESLEY: *You said this is a book that is slightly more feminized?*

KAREN: Yes. But its still a book that boys can read. There are so many characters in AMETHYST, too, and the concept holds up well — a thirteen-year-old girl that can also be a twenty-year-old woman. It's like an ALICE IN WONDERLAND fairy tale taken one step further. I think that every child might sometime have dreamed that their parents were not really their parents — that they were an orphan from another world, perhaps a place like the Gemworld. The land consists of twelve royal houses named after the twelve birthstones of the year. And what's so great with that is each reader can identify with the house of their birth and the lords and ladies, princes and princesses that dwell there.

The book has a strong soap-opera quality incorporated in the fantasy sections and the everyday earth sections, too. We're planning to bring back much of the intensity and drama prevalent in the maxi-series and I think it will excite a lot of the readers who read the maxi-series but never came back. The maxi-series was a very compelling, driven story that was twelve issues, but was really one long tale. We didn't have that much time then to spend on Earth. In the new book we're going to spend some more time with Amy, doing Earth-type things. In an effort to appeal more to girl readers, we might have toned the book down too much initually with the ongoing monthly because we lost some of our male readers. They're still out there — the book seems to have a good mix. But, again, we're putting back a lot of the strong elements from the maxi-series — and I'm very confident with what's to come creatively.

LESLEY: *Did Roger Slifer repeat to you a compliment that Ernie Colon made about you recently?*

KAREN: No.

LESLEY: *Several of us were having dinner at Ruppert's and Ernie said, "Karen is the best editor because she really lets the artist do pretty much their own thing. She knows when to edit and when to leave a good thing alone." I am quoting loosely but it was very complimentary.*

KAREN: That's nice. Ernie was a lot of fun to work with. We also argued a little, too.

LESLEY: *That's part of working with Ernie. Or any artist for that matter. I think it may have to do with being couped up alone all day and not having anyone to talk with. They go crazy when they're out of their cages!*

KAREN: It's a real emotional thing.

LESLEY: *What else?*

KAREN: ARION's cancelled. Sword and sorcery is hard to pull off. Most books that are non-super-hero don't sell that well. That's why I'm so happy with SWAMP THING's rising sales.

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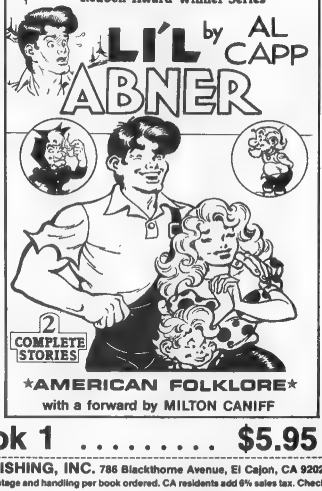

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"I think everyone needs an editor."

LESLEY: *Anybody in particular that you'd like to work with?*

KAREN: Not really. I think that **Bill Sienkiewicz'** stuff is really interesting to look at. There are a lot of writer/editors now, so that eliminates some.

LESLEY: *Do you think that is a good thing?*

KAREN: No. I think everyone needs an editor. Even if the editor doesn't do anything, you need someone to talk out ideas with. Not that writer/editors don't talk their ideas out — but you need an objective observer. You can suffer too much from tunnel-vision. This is the only industry that I know of that has writer/editors. I've never seen the title in any book. Why should comics be any different? Even if the editor doesn't have as much experience as the writer — I think that's why writer/editors came into being in the first place — writers who have been at it for fifteen years get an editor who has been editing for one and they say, "What do *they* know about comics? I don't want them to edit my stuff." I can't sit there and not agree with them on some points, but I still think that you need a third person. People just get too wound up in themselves. They need someone else over there saying, "Don't do that!" or "Do that!" You need it as much for good things as bad things. After all, who's going to pat them on their head?

LESLEY: *So the editor is the one who gives them feedback. This is the last question, and it coincides with the end of the tape. What about yourself? Do you have any interest in being a writer?*

KAREN: *(Meekly.)* No. *(Laughter.)* No, I'm very happy being an editor. I think —

LESLEY: (Protests.) *Never wanted to be a writer? Every editor wants to write to show how it should be done! Every editor wants to do it better than they've seen it done before!*

KAREN: I think my strengths as an editor are stronger. I can write well, but when it comes to sitting down and actually writing a story, it would take me a long time to do it. What comes easy to me is looking at other people's work and being critical and suggesting things. I have a lot of ideas.

I don't know. Maybe it would come easy to me. Maybe I'm just lazy. I'm happy being an editor.

LESLEY: *Can you see yourself getting into mainstream?*

KAREN: Maybe. I was lucky to get a job at DC when I did. I was lucky to come through the ranks and be around for those opportunities and — you know, they've been very good to me. I have a lot of freedom here and I like the people who I work with, and who I work for. Comics are a lot of fun! You can't say that about a lot of other areas of publishing. We've had people come from "straight" publishing — and at one point I made it very clear that I wanted to leave comics and these people said, "Oh, why? You don't want to go there."

LESLEY: *It does look so much fun being at DC or Marvel. Where else do big statues of Superman sit leisurely in the reception area?*

KAREN: Right. Maybe this doesn't sound too ambitious of me, or narrowminded or stupidly content, I don't know. I think comics is an underrated field by the "real world." I think that people should put aside their condescension towards the medium, pick one of the books up and *read* it!

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"Trying to get licenses from DC or Marvel is a major job. A major feat."

Perfectionist. No other word quite so well sums up Bob Chapman, the driving force behind Graphitti Studios. In an era of shoddy, unimaginative, and often juvenile comic-book merchandising, Bob stands tall among the crowd. His refusal to compromise his standards has endeared him to artists, industry professionals, and fans alike.

This interview took place within the depths of the Graphitti plant amongst the heady aromas of printer's ink and silkscreens. I found Bob to be sincere, totally professional, and a lot of fun...

Photo: Ken Jones

BOB CHAPMAN

KEN JONES: *How did you become interested in the merchandising of comic book characters?*

BOB CHAPMAN: It just seemed like the logical thing to do. Three years ago, nobody else was doing T-shirts or anything like that with the art and designs available in comics. I did and still do have a screen-printing business. I was screen printing for all kinds of local things, so I just connected the two and started Graphitti Designs, using licensed designs by comic-book artists featuring comic-book characters and such.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Bob Chapman
Born: 5 September 1952
Residence: Yorba Linda, CA
Occupation: Producer of auxiliary products for the direct sales comics market and screen-printer.
Hobbies: Automobiles
Favorite Comics Artist: That's tough — any artist who puts his heart and soul into his work.

KEN: *How many people are involved in the production of your product at this time?*

BOB: Involved? The artists do a large proportion of the work by supplying the art and giving me as much input as they want about how they want the finished art to look — but, as far as the production end, I handle a large portion of it. I do the bulk of the preparation of the art and screens myself, but I do have other people who help out with the printing. I do a lot of the ad layouts myself, too, so I have my finger on just about everything. I delegate as much as possible, but I am kind of a pain in that I want a certain kind of look — and the only way I can get that look is to do it myself. This business is such a relatively small thing, at the moment, that you don't need a large outfit to do it. I do have a partner with the pin part of the business, though — **John Koukoutsakis.**

KEN: *I noticed that most of your T-shirts feature creator-owned alternative comics characters. Why is this?*

BOB: Probably for a number of reasons, one being that personally I like those type of characters and the artist/creators involved. But, also, trying to get licenses from DC or Marvel is a major job. I tried to get my foot in the door with them and it's a major feat.

KEN: *Are they just not interested?*

BOB: They're interested, but they think that the comics market is so large that you can promise them quantities and revenues which I think are almost unrealistic. You know,

"The new CEREBUS shirt's our bestseller."

Comic Images started doing the Marvel shirts a year ago. At one time, I was talking with **Carol Kalish** in regards to doing shirts with Marvel characters and it just didn't work out. I don't know exactly why, but there were just all kinds of funny things happening.

I also approached DC — DC has a large licensing corporation — called Licensing Corporation of America, I think — that takes care of the Warner Bros. properties, DC Comics, and their Atari products. To get involved with DC, they need to see numbers that are incredible — you have to show them things that I just really couldn't show them, and I don't think that anybody really could, because I don't think that the comics market can really support those kind of numbers. For example, if you make, say, a SWAMP THING T-shirt, you won't be able to put it into a Sears or a J.C. Penney. The purchasers for those companies won't buy that type of product because of the character's limited visibility. A SPIDER-MAN or SUPERMAN T-shirt would be different — those are accessible characters to kids and kids would buy them anywhere. Most comic-book characters can only be sold in a very limited market, the Direct Sales comics market. They aren't saleable in most chain department stores — and that's the only way you can get large enough numbers to make DC and Marvel happy.

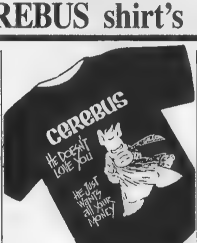
I've done a few things with Marvel. I've worked their Epic line with **Michael Kaluta**'s STARSTRUCK. I've worked with **Sergio Aragones** and GROO. They're published by Marvel, but they're still creator-owner properties. But at DC, their licensing corporation is just a really hard thing to get involved with. They want you to promise them big dollars; when it's not a big-dollar type of thing. They really shouldn't even look at it like that — money shouldn't be the only concern. It's really more of a grand promotion type of thing, the visibility should almost be enough of a draw for these companies to want to get involved with this type of thing. The money should be *almost* a secondary concern. All of these characters could use the visibility which quality T-shirts could give them.

KEN: *That seems reasonable. It's good advertising, right?*

BOB: Sure. Even if they make no money on it, they could just consider it good advertising. DC and Marvel are set up to make money — I understand why they have this opinion — but there are other considerations. DC will probably never have a SWAMP THING T-shirt or . . .

KEN: *Say, THE OMEGA MEN, for instance?*

BOB: Just because enough money cannot be made from it, to make it worthwhile for their licensing arms to get involved. They only look at it in terms of money, not in terms of other levels of success and visibility.



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KEN: *That's a shame. Besides people ordering through your advertisements in comic-book fan magazines, how else are your T-shirts distributed?*

BOB: The bulk of the shirts are sold to distributors like Bud Plant, Capital City, and Glenwood, who sell to the shops. That's where probably 90% to 95% of my sales are. Very, very few of my sales are mail-order generated. I just want to make the mail order available, in case people can't get the shirts from their shops, or anywhere else. Working with distributors and their distribution system is a great way to go — the network is already there. It allows the retailers to pick them up the same way they pick up comics.

KEN: *What was your first mass-produced T-shirt?*

BOB: The first comic-related shirt I did was for the San Diego Comic-Convention in 1981. It had a SHEENA-type design by **Dave Stevens**. That was my first opportunity to meet Dave — it was before he did ROCKETEER. It was a different type of project. I did it in connection with the Con. My first two licensed designs were the ROCKETEER by **Dave Stevens** and **Will Eisner**'s SPIRIT. After that, I thought, "Gosh, where the hell do you go from here?" **Will Eisner** gave me the opportunity to work with him, even though I had no credentials as far as a track record or past shirt dealings. Nobody else was producing that kind of a shirt. He liked the quality of my product, so we talked and he said, "Let's give it a try." Like I said, I already had a rapport with **Dave Stevens**, and the first ROCKETEER story was out about that time, so Dave said, "Let's do a Rocketeer shirt," and I said "Fine!" ROCKETEER had — and still has — quite a following, so it worked out fine. I started off with two very strong shirts and it kind of went from there

KEN: *What is your current all-time best-selling T-shirt?*

BOB: Things have changed recently and I would have to say that it's the new CEREBUS shirt, where he is "The Most Boly." It's just been out a couple of months and already it's our bestseller, and it hasn't stopped yet. It looks like it's going to do really, really well.

KEN: *So you feel there is an audience out there for CEREBUS?*

BOB: There is, even though the comic only has a circulation of 22,000 or 23,000, which isn't that much. But the people who read CEREBUS are loyal fans. Percentage-wise, it's a real good market. The reaction to this shirt has been great. It's already surpassing anything we've done in the past.

KEN: *When you produce a T-shirt, do you have to deal with each individual creator at, for instance, Eclipse Comics — or do you deal with a company representative?*

BOB: I try to deal with the creator, because my original intentions were and still are to produce a shirt or a pin or whatever that will be something the creator will be proud of and pleased with. So, in other words, I take as much input from the artist as I can. I like to work with the artist as much as possible. I've worked with the companies a few times, but I prefer direct input from the creator. The creators prefer it that way, too, because when the shirts come out they're *exactly* the way the creator wants them to be. We do some proofs and some prototypes, and if the creator isn't happy with it, we change this and change that, so by the time the shirt is made available to the public it looks, theoretically, the way an artist wants it to look. So he's happy and I am, too. I try to use his artistic sensibilities to get out shirts that are "just right" in all possible ways.

KEN: *How would potential clients who want you to do a T-shirt contact you?*

BOB: It works two different ways. Originally, I thought I was gonna have to go to all of these people and say "Hey, here's how I do my work, here's the quality involved." After a while, it started getting to the point where creators began contacting me — which I never expected. It was really strange that I'd only been doing this for, like, six months or so, when Sergio Aragones called me up. He said he'd seen some of my shirts and would I like to do a Groo T-shirt? So things took off from there, with word-of-mouth and the quality of the shirts preceding me. I never expected it to fall into place like this . . .

KEN: *What is the exact process involved in making a Graphitti T-shirt?*

BOB: We start with artwork or a stat from the artist, hopefully. He'll send me a color guide keyed just like those used for comics. It's then hand-separated, exposed to the

"The *character* does sell a shirt."

© 1985 Aardvark-Vanaheim

screens themselves, and printed. Pretty easy, huh? On the bulk of the shirts we screen now, we use the three primary colors and black — which allows the use of any color needed, just like a comic. Just using those three colors, and black, we can produce a hundred colors or so. That's one reason why a number of our designs are on light-colored shirts — because the inks we use are transparant. Let's say we use a blue shirt and put on a yellow ink: you're going to get green. So a white or a neutral-colored shirt must be used, instead. The hand separations take quite a bit of time — that's how come I proof them, because there's always room for error. A lot of my newer shirts — the BUCKY O'HARE shirt, the STARSTRUCK shirt, and the new ROCKETEER shirt — utilized laser-scanned color. With the "Rocketeer and Betty" shirt, for instance, Dave gave me the original and we got a transparency shot of that, and they separated it like they separate a laser-scan comic or magazine. You have nice gradation and tones and it looks just like the original art. When the artwork and sales potential dictate, this is the process we try to use.

KEN: *How do you select the exact work you will put on a T-shirt?*

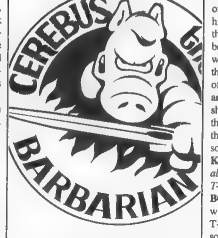
BOB: I leave this to the artists most of the time, and rely on their skills and judgement. New art was generated for quite a few of our shirts, which is always great. On a few, like **Will Eisner**'s SPIRIT shirt, we used an existing design and it worked out real well. With most of the artists, we start from square one, and they work out something new just for use on a shirt. If we go that route, I like to see a sketch, so that I know we're going in the right direction. I trust their instincts and abilities and it's worked every time. When they know it's going to be for T-shirt application, a lot of times they'll say, "Let's do something a little bit strange," like with the first Groo T-shirt that had a front and back design. It was done originally for the cover of, I think, Pacific's GROO #5 — but Sergio modified it and extended the design a little bit on each side. It got a real good reaction.

KEN: *How did you become interested in comic books?*

BOB: Twenty-odd years ago my brother John and I read and collected comics. Somewhere in the early '70s we departed from comics. As mentioned before, the 1981 San Diego Con shirt, plus picking up books like THE STUDIO and such, got me re-involved in this field — but in a new way. With my business experience and comics knowledge, I began talking to creators with regards to T-shirts and took it from there.

KEN: *Do you read comics now? Do you have any current favorites?*

BOB: I read some. I look at comics more than read them. There are comics I do read



— like THE ROCKETEER, LOVE AND ROCKETS, SPIRIT, SWAMP THING, CEREBUS. I don't read the bulk of comics — I don't have the time.

KEN: *What is the one character T-shirt that you want to do that you haven't been able to do yet?*

BOB: I try to base my work more around artists than I do characters, but I've learned that the character is what sells the T-shirt. I did a **John Byrne** T-shirt which I thought was really a great idea — but since it wasn't character-involved and didn't have the X-MEN or FANTASTIC FOUR on it, it didn't quite have the interest and sales it should have. The *character* does sell a shirt. Now I try to connect an artist with a character. I'd like to do something with **Steranko** — even though I am not sure how many people know who he is. In fact, there probably is a whole generation of fans that doesn't know who **Jim Steranko** is, what he did, and how much he contributed to the medium in terms of design-oriented storytelling in the '60s. I really liked his contribution to SUPERMAN #400. I think **Steranko** would work well on a shirt because he does a lot of nice pure design work. Really nice stuff! I'd like to do something with **Wrightson**. I've had the pleasure of working with **Kaluta** a couple of times and he's a great talent. He wants to do more shirts. He's want to do all sorts of strange things. I am game, even though I don't think that it will be financially viable — it still sounds like fun.

KEN: *Why don't you give us a roll call of all the creators you've worked with on T-shirts?*

BOB: **Will Eisner**, **Dave Stevens**, I worked with **Milton Caniff** on a STEVE CANYON T-shirt. It was a shame he isn't a super hero, so it would be more commercial. If people read the STEVE CANYON book that **Denis Kitchen** is putting out they would see that it is better artistically and storywise than a large portion of what's produced today. Working with **Caniff** was really nice. It's just a shame that I couldn't do more with the sales of the shirt in the market. I did a MS. TREE shirt with **Terry Beatty** that was interesting. I did GROO with Sergio. I did the design with **John Byrne**. I've done a lot of things with **Dave Sim**. I did a "Cerebus for Dictator" shirt two years back. I did the Elrod T-shirt. We were going to do a Wolveroach T-shirt. We had the design and I was ready to print the shirt and Deni called me up and said, "Don't print the shirt." That's when there was that little legal thung brewing between the **Sims** and Marvel about Wolverroach and Wolverine. I did DNAGENTS with **Will Meugniot** and **Mark Evanier**. I did LOVE AND ROCKETS with the **Brothers** and they're always good for a laugh. I did JOURNEY with **Bill Loebs**. We worked together and tried to do something different with the shirt. It's a front and back design that's sort

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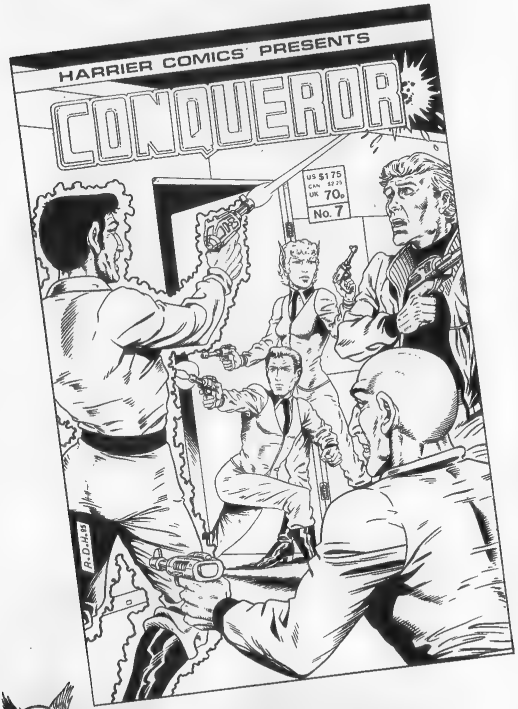

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BOB CHAPMAN

"You won't be able to put a SWAMP THING T-shirt into Sears or Penney's."

Photo: Ken Jones

of animated. You see Wolverine MacAlistaire doing a jumping thing on the front and on back he's shooting something off the head of one of the other characters. I've worked with **Moebius** and it was amazing. He called me up to do the shirt and I was thrilled. He's a real talent. He's not real commercial, but the people who like him tend to be the same people who like LOVE AND ROCKETS — the professionals and the artists. Every line **Moebius** does is just fantastic. I did a whole series of Conan shirts that was related to the CONAN THE DESTROYER movie. Great movie! *(Laughter.)* It was like a whole different ballgame. It seemed to have greater commercial potential than the licenses we had worked with before. We did four different shirts. **Michael Kaluta** did a shirt that was a comic-book Conan design, **Bil Stout** — he was the production artist for the movie — he did a real nice design and he also did the logo. We did a photo shirt of Conan — a picture, from the movie, of Arnold. It was just a shame that the movie wasn't a real big success. I worked with **Valentino** on normalman. He's here, locally, so it was nice. I prefer the luxury of working with people face-to-face when possible, although over the phone has become the norm. I like working with people face-to-face, it sets up a nicer working rapport. There's the new "Rocketeer and Betty" T-shirt which is a little *risque*, but it's within safe limits. We're doing a MR. MONSTER T-shirt with **Michael Gilbert** — not that I thought that it would be a bestseller, but I like his work from the WRAITH and a number of different things that he's done. When Pacific published that one episode of Mr. Monster, somehow Michael and I got together and started talking and we said — even though there's only that one story out — let's do a T-shirt. Then Pacific "disappeared," but we still went ahead, and by the time Eclipse published the first issue, there was an ad for the T-shirt on the back cover. It did good, considering that there's been no regular MR. MONSTER book until now. As far as newer designs, there is BUCKY O'HARE by **Michael Golden** — that's from Continuity. It was nice working with **Kris** and **Neal Adams** and **John Hartz**. There's MEGATON MAN from **Denis Kitchen**, done by **Donald Simpson**, then there's MR. X from Vortex Comics.

KEN: *That's done by the Brothers?*

BOB: No, it isn't. It's a design by **Dean Motter**. I was hoping I was going to work again with **Jamie Hernandez** on a MR. X design. But instead publisher **Bill Marx** sent me a real nice design by **Motter** that's fantastic. It's on a black shirt and it's shadowy and works really good. One of the things we'll be doing in the future, too, is pins. We started doing that last year. It was with **Dave Stevens** again — he wanted to do something a little bit different. We did the Rocketeer cloisonne pin — that turned out to be a fantastic-looking pin, which was well-received by all who saw it. We are going to do a series of four CEREBUS pins, along with an AMERICAN FLAGG pin that is going to feature the logo. I talked to **Rick Obadiah** and **Howard Chaykin**, and I'd sent a prototype that they really liked. There's going to be a NEIL THE HORSE pin, which will be interesting — I think the pin will be picked up even by people who don't know or read the comic

KEN: *Would you like to move into other areas of merchandising?*

BOB: Originally, I just wanted to silkscreen T-shirts. Then, we expanded into the pins. Right now, it looks like we'll be expanding even further with the ROCKETEER graphic novel coming out in July — we're going to be producing a signed limited hardbound edition of the book. We think there is a market for that kind of quality collectible item. There's possibly another hardbound, signed limited edition graphic novel that we'll be involved with, but I can't talk about it because it's not wrapped up yet. We're now at the point where being quality-oriented is our primary criteria — quality at a fair price. The more successful and profitable we are, the more of this type of product we'll be able to produce. We think there's a market for this. When we went to the Star*Reach tradeshow a couple of weeks ago, we got a good feedback about the quality of our shirts and pins. It was very encouraging.

KEN: *What else was of interest at the tradeshow?*

BOB: It was nice — hopefully, more dealers will go to future shows, because the idea of a tradeshow is long overdue. It is needed and I think **Mike Friedrich** and the San Diego people have the right idea. It gives retailers and producers a chance to talk face-to-face with all the companies. Also, there's money to be made in the comic-book business. Comic-book stores are a big link in the success of the whole comics industry, and their success helps anybody remotely connected with the business. The tradeshows are instructive as far as store appearance, management, finances, and security. There were retailers from all over. **Buddy Saunders** was there from Texas, there were people from New York and Canada. There's a lot of interesting things left to do in terms of comics merchandising, and it helps the industry as a whole if done tastefully. Hopefully, we can give extra visibility and extra quality to these characters. A quality T-shirt or pin will never hurt any book's sale and should have a positive effect.

KEN: *Here's your chance to make a pitch to a large audience of comics fans — tell us why we should buy your products.*

BOB: We would like to offer quality products to the comic market at a fair price. We feel that there is a market for quality items out there which we will attempt to cater to. When people see the Graphitti logo on a product, we would like them to connect that with an item that was produced with input from the artist/creator, at an accessible price, and with a high regard to the quality involved in the production. The more backing we receive for our projects, the more diverse they will become.

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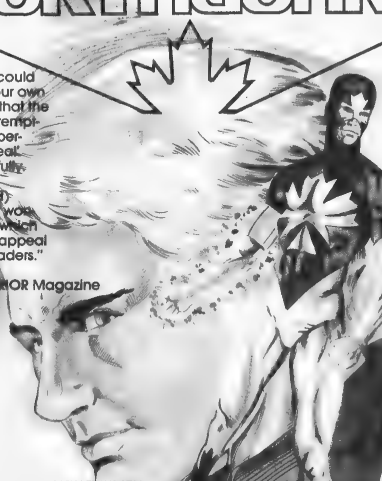

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"The only hesitation in doing this was my identity. People want to figure out who I am."

T.M. MAPLE

Who is the Mad Maple? We don't know, and neither did Gary Mugford, who interviewed him over the telephone, or Mike Sopp, who transcribed the interview and communicated with the Mad Maple via his favorite system, the mails.

And they still don't, a most frustrating feeling. But at least they do have the distinction of producing the first interview with the Mad Maple to see print. At least, as far as we know...

For seven years, letters of criticism and commentary have been emanating from the Great White North. Over the course of those seven years, the Mad Maple has become one of the leading letterhacks in comicdom, having had over 500 letters printed during that time span.

There have been other writers with just as prolific an output, perhaps – but certainly not with as mysterious a persona. Why is COMICS INTERVIEW talking with a person who won't even provide a decent picture to print with the interview? The mystery of the person behind the obvious pseudonym is the obvious answer. And it doesn't hurt that T.M. seems to be the best Canadian commentator on things American since David Steinberg helped sink THE SMOTHERS BROTHERS

Mugford and Sopp tracked down the elusive Maple to his "Fortress of Mapletude," only to find the barriers to learning who he really is too great to penetrate. Mugford asserts that T.M. is, indeed, a man – probably middle-aged and seemingly well-educated. His speaking voice is the kind radio stations kill for. And that's all Mugford can tell us. Everything else he knows, you'll know after reading this interview...

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: T. M. Maple

Residence: Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Occupation: No comment.

Favorite TV Shows: HOCKEY NIGHT IN CANADA, DR. WHO, HILL STREET BLUES, and SEEING THINGS.

Favorite Movies: HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME (with Charles Laughton), ARSENIC AND OLD LACE, ON THE WATER FRONT, and ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD (with Errol Flynn).

Favorite SF Authors: Asimov, Wyndham, Clarke, Niven, and Simak.

Favorite Musical Performer: Ian Thomas

Favorite Classical Composers: John Phillip Sousa, Ludwig von Beethoven

Favorite Beverage: "It's obviously clean, fresh Canadian water, straight from the lake."

Favorite Current Comics: BATMAN/DETECTIVE COMICS, SWAMP THING, TEEN TITANS, CAPTAIN AMERICA, DAREDEVIL, IRON MAN, X-MEN, JOURNEY, NEXUS, TALES OF THE BEANWORLD, JONAH HEX, and ATARI FORCE.

Favorite Past Comics: SUPERMAN, BATMAN, JUSTICE LEAGUE, AVENGERS, and SPIDER-MAN.

"I am T. M. Maple but he's not me."

GARY MUGFORD: *Hello, how are you, Mr. Maple?*

T. M. MAPLE: I'm just fine.

GARY: *I take it that you are willing to accept "Mr. Maple" as a nickname?*

T. M.: I don't know. It sounds a little bit too like I'm a wrestler or something.

GARY: *Okay, well let's call you T. M. then.*

T. M.: Yeah, let's call me T. M.

GARY: *Are you willing to give us your real name?*

T. M.: No.

GARY: *And, unless you are using a voice changer, one would assume you are a male from your speaking voice.*

T. M.: That's your assumption.

GARY: *You mentioned something about "the Fortress of Mapletude?"*

T. M.: That's a generic name for my wonderful residence here.

GARY: *Where is your favorite place to read comics in the Fortress of Mapletude?*

T. M.: Just in the reading room — one of the vast multitudes of special purpose facilities in my fortress.

GARY: *And that room serves no other purpose than being a reading room?*

T. M.: It does not, no.

GARY: *Do you have a favorite writer?*

T. M.: Not really, and you'd get no comment on that out of me anyhow.

GARY: *And I assume similarly for favorite artists?*

T. M.: Right. I have my favorites but I don't want to single anyone out and get everyone all upset.

GARY: *How about your favorite supporting character in comics?*

T. M.: Well, at the moment, it's Judah Maccabee of NEXUS.

GARY: *Any specific reason for that?*

T. M.: I don't know. Maybe it is the way he plays off Nexus. I just find that he's a fun sort of guy.

GARY: *You don't see any of yourself in him at all?*

T. M.: Physically speaking, of course *(laughter)*. Otherwise I really shouldn't comment.

GARY: *How about your favorite Canadian in comics?*

T. M.: It's obviously me — there are so few. Fictionally, I'll pick Captain Canuck for a symbolic value. And if you want a real person you'd have to give me a list of Canadians in comics so I wouldn't leave anybody out.

GARY: *And since that list is a little bit hard to get your hands on you're gonna take the Fifth on that.*

T. M.: That's right.

GARY: *Which is an American term, not used here in Canada — but this is an American magazine, after all.*

T. M.: Of course. No American terms are used in Canada.

GARY: *Fer sher. What's your collection like?*

T. M.: It's not that great. I don't have any particularly old or valuable issues, monetarywise. I find I correspond a different value to them than **Overstreet** does. I tend not to be really sentimental about old copies — if there is enough money offered for them, and I need the money, I'll sell 'em. There are some comics I wouldn't part with, I must say.

GARY: *Where do you keep your collection?*

T. M.: Obviously, in the Fortress of Mapletude, in the Comic Collection Room. You should be able to figure that one out.

GARY: *They're not scattered all over the house, though?*

T. M.: Except when I'm reading them.

GARY: *What specific comic book prompted you to send in your first letter?*

T. M.: It was an issue of BATMAN.

GARY: *Dated?*

T. M.: May of '78.

GARY: *So that's approximately seven years ago. In the interim since then, you have written approximately how many letters?*

T. M.: As of March 31st of this year, I wrote 2,045.

GARY: *How many have you had published out of that lot?*

T. M.: A month ago, somebody else was asking this, so I decided to go through my notorious files and calculate it, because I don't keep a running total. At that point, 532 was the figure I came up with.

GARY: *So you've basically had one out of every four letters published. What is your highest total of sending letters for a particular month?*

T. M.: As I recall, it's in the fifties . . . fifty-two . . . fifty-four? And the least — except for mail strikes — was about four.

GARY: *Which we have had an occasion to suffer through up here in Canada — a mail strike.*

T. M.: Since I assumed T. M. Maple (I am T. M. Maple but he's not me), I think we've only had the one mail strike — the 43-day one in '80 or '81 — so it's not been that bad.

GARY: *"The Mad Maple" — an interest-*

"I'm just a 'wild and crazy guy.' "

© 1979 CMS Prods. Ltd.

ing nickname. Why did you assume the nickname?

T. M.: Good question. "The Maple" obviously refers to the country, Canada — and, I guess, the "Mad" part because it starts with an M and I guess I'm just a "wild and crazy guy." *(Laughter.)*

GARY: *You're now known as T. M. Maple?*

T. M.: Yes. I picked the name "for good and sufficient reasons" — put that in quotes, because that's all I'm gonna say about it, and in a moment of whimsy I chose the rather demonstrative pseudonym of The Mad Maple for reasons just given.

As soon as I chose it, I wasn't really happy with it — it's a little bit too glitzy. But I figured I might as well stick to it. Obviously, certain other people agreed with me. A lot of my letters that were published early on were given as from "unsigned" or "name not given" or something like that.

Over at Marvel they liked to use different versions of the name, like "M. Maple," "Tim Maple," "Mat Maple," so on. I figured that's their business, it really didn't bother me, but that wasn't really my name. I sort of felt committed to my name.

Then in CAPTAIN AMERICA #241 — there goes the **Overstreet** price on that one — they used the name "T. M. Maple." It was used again in GHOST RIDER #41 and #42. This kind of appealed to me because it wasn't as ostentatious as the first one, but it was my name. So I figured that would be a good one to adopt. After all, there are people with the last name Maple, so it very well could be a real person's name. It wasn't so ostentatious, so I started using that.

I found out, in 1984, in the pages of THE COMIC READER, that **Steven Grant** was the one who came up with the abbreviated version. So a tip of the hat to **Mr. Grant**. I didn't realize that, at the time, because Marvel's letter columns aren't usually signed.

GARY: *So you're operating under this pseudonym and you're sending in these piles and piles of letters. What was it about that first BATMAN issue that prompted you to send in your first letter?*

T. M.: As I recall, it was one of those deals where the editor asked a question, "Hey, readers, what should we do about this?" I figured I've got opinions, I've got a big mouth, I might as well start sending in some of these wonderful thoughts that I have. Once I got started, it just took off from there.

GARY: *Was it a typical T. M. Maple letter?*

T. M.: Well, I don't really know what that is, what a "typical T. M. Maple letter" is like. I looked it up a while back, when somebody else asked this question — it was a pretty undistinguished letter, half a page or so, and it really didn't say anything interesting.

GARY: *What's the extremes for a T. M. Maple letter? What's the longest letter you've sent, and what's the shortest?*

T. M.: Aha! A new twist! The longest is around three, four, maybe even five pages of typed, one-and-one-half-spaced material, and it might have been to THE COMIC READER. I've written some long ones to them. Or it might have been a letter to WARRIOR that I wrote, which was four pages long. I was commenting on the first seven issues, I think.

The shortest probably runs one or two lines. When **Ernie Colon** was editing GREEN LANTERN he ran a lot of short letters. So I wrote in a letter saying, "I don't like short letters, I like long letters."

GARY: (Laughter.) *Defending your letter-writing privileges.*

T. M.: Right. There's been a few one sentence ones — none of them got published, by the way — so maybe people like me when I shoot off at the mouth, I don't know. But I think that if one sentence says it, then it says it. Mind you, some of my sentences run two to three pages!

Richard Comely's Canadian superhero, CAPTAIN CANUCK.

GARY: *Do you think the fact that you've assumed a pseudonym has helped or hindered your publication rate?*

T. M.: That's an interesting question. I would say that it's operated on both sides. On the positive side, I've gotten a few packages from DC and also one from First, "We're gonna publish this comic, so give us a letter, and if it is good enough we'll print it in issue #4." So I guess that helps get a few letters published in that regard — if you're such a known person that they send an advance photocopy. I got a couple of things from Britain that way, too.

I think that it's probably worse on the downside. Earlier in my "career" a lot of the letters that might have been published otherwise were tossed aside, because they said, "Well, this guy's not serious," or "This guy's out for a flash in the pan and we'll just ignore him." I think it was only later, when I kept sending in the letters, that they realized I was here to stay.

Probably, all in all, using a pseudonym might be a negative factor.

GARY: *Some people seem to be upset that certain others, such as yourself, always seem to get their letters printed, while they never get their letters printed. Could you comment on that?*

T. M.: As I mentioned earlier, and you gave the percentages, I only get about 25% to 30% of my letters printed. So I don't think I get

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"Writing letters to get published, that's approaching it from the wrong direction."

all or most of my letters printed, anyhow.

I must say I've gotten letters from several individuals who say, "It must be nice to be 'T. M. Maple' and get all or most of your letters printed and I only get 40, 50, 60 or 70% of mine printed." I'd be surprised to hit 40, 50, 60 or, Lord knows, 70% — and yet they seem to be upset!

First of all, you have to wonder what these people are expecting and, secondly, I think a lot of this comes from people who have written a small number of letters and they get discouraged.

I might point out that I got something like three out of my first 40 letters printed, and I think it was around my fifteenth or twentieth one that the first one was printed. You've got to hang in there from the start. You've got to expect that you won't be perfect — well, you'll never be perfect — but you may not be so great, right off the bat.

If you're getting into writing letters for the purpose of getting published, I think that's approaching it from the wrong direction. You should get into it because you want to say something. If you get published, that's a nice by-product.

I'm not saying that people complained just because they weren't getting their letters printed. I think the ones that wrote to me were the ones who like to write in, because they have something to say, and were surprised or upset because they didn't get some printed.

The key thing is, they get discouraged too easily. There are still comics that I've been writing to for seven years that haven't printed any of my letters, and we won't mention them, of course.

I think that, if you take any given month, there are people who get more letters printed than I do. I just picked up a batch of comics the other day, and it seems that every one had a letter from **Dale Cole** in it, and if you go back you get guys like **Mike Sopp, Beppo Sabatini, Stephen Scott Beau Smith** (a fan with a name that never ends), **David Allan Wright, Andy McLaney, Charles David Haskell,** The **Brown Twins: Kevin T.** and **Charles D.** — these are a few names that come to mind off the top of my head. I think that if you go back and check they've had pretty respectable numbers too, and probably outclass me.

GARY: *Do you correspond with any of them?*

T. M.: I do correspond with a few people. Of the ones just mentioned, I've had a lot of correspondence with **Mike Sopp** and **David Allan Wright.** I've had some contact with **Beau Smith**, and I didn't mention him, but **John Henry Sain**, who has been known to be printed, and also **Andy McLaney**. There's no conspiracy here, fellas.

GARY: *Do you guys get together and exchange letter-writing secrets? Are there any secrets you can pass on to the people who might not be getting their letters printed regularly?*

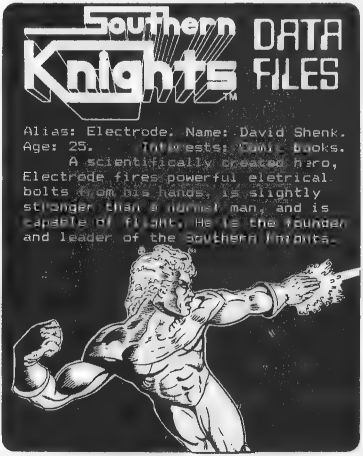
T. M.: Interestingly enough, in all the personal correspondence, I don't think the letterhacks who were frequently published have ever asked me what *I* do to get my letters published. I would assume that they're so confident in their abilities that they wouldn't ask stupid ol' me, or that, just being themselves, they don't need any tips in that regard.

That sort of gives you a hint of what I'm going to say about tips, in that I don't think there are any to give, apart from the standard ones about format: Your letter should be typed or, if you're going to handwrite it, at least make it legible. Also, try to organize your thoughts before you write, and things like that. There are certainly no real tricks to it. "Hey, if I knew the tricks, I could write a great letter!" I think you just write what you feel and want to express and go from there.

If you want to talk about the ability to do it — I think it comes from doing it. If there is an adjustment to your letter writing it comes from doing it time and again, and I think you realize a few of the things you are doing can be adjusted to better effect.

GARY: *Do you feel that you and other letter writers have specific input into the comics?*

T. M.: Well, I think you have to divide the effects of letters into two categories: One is from an editor's or writer's standpoint — what is the particular comment made about the product? What was the reaction to this issue, this event, this decision? Whether the people who wrote in think it was a good decision, a bad decision, did they like it or ignore it?


Southern Knights™
DATA FILES
Alias: Electrode. Name: David Shenk.
Age: 25. Interests: Comic books.
A scientifically created hero, Electrode fires powerful eletrical bolts from his hands, is slightly stronger than a normal man, and is capable of flight. He is the founder and leader of the Southern Knights.

"T. M. Maple qualifies as a real person

The second category is specific points made by the letter.

I think the first group would have the most effect, because the sales figures tell them something, but it only tells them if people bought the issue, not why they bought it or what they liked about it or didn't like about it.

As far as specifics go, I don't really think there is that much effect. A few times I've had the person who answered the letter in the letter column — of course, that isn't always the editor or the writer — say, "You've got a good idea," but I don't know how much effect that really has: Things are plotted so much in advance of when a letter comes in on a specific issue that, even if they thought it was a good idea, they wouldn't have a chance to incorporate it — because most letters are looking at the recent past or the near future. The past is already done and gone and the near future is already set, as far as comics go.

GARY: *So you've had no reason to believe you've had any specific input to any particular comic-book storyline?*

T. M.: Nothing that I recall. I think if there is any influence, it might be to get the writer to think in a different light. But even then, what he does may have no relation to what I was thinking of when I suggested it.

GARY: *We're now headed for the part of this interview where we become industry experts and tell the world what we think is right and wrong about comic books. T. M., are you encouraged about the direction comic books are going in right now?*

T. M.: The thing that has happened in the last few years that is most encouraging is the change in the structure — that the creators have more incentive, shall we say, to produce good comics, and more reward when they do produce good comics. So I think, number one, that enables the industry to hold onto the top talents. There was a period, not so long ago, when it seemed that most of the top talent — especially on the artists' side, but also on the writing side — quickly left comics, probably because they felt confined by the financial attributes of it, although for some it was an artistic situation.

On the artistic side, the new formats, the different grades of paper and also the fact that you don't have to necessarily publish on a set schedule *(laughter)*, given the many mini-series and specials and so on, allows more artistic latitude.

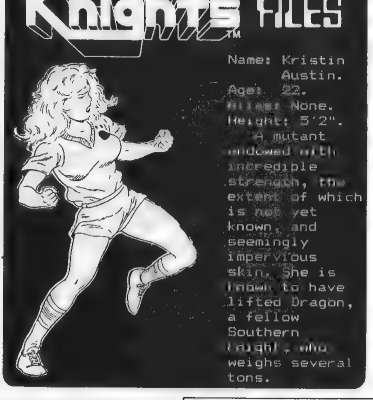
So I think that it is the structure that's encouraged me. The possibility is there for a breakthrough in content and in market, although whether that's happened or not already, I really don't know. I guess it really hasn't in'a major way. There are certainly a lot of good products on the market now, as opposed to a few years ago — but I think that we haven't seen the big change and I'm thinking primarily in the types of comics that are being done. It seems to me that what has happened in recent years, with the growth of the independents and the rise of the comics shops, is that basically they're still selling to the same people. I think that is one reason why the back issue market is so bad right now. There is so much new stuff coming out and it is good, better than what was before, that people are buying the new stuff and don't have the money available for the back issues.

Or maybe it's the changing market. After all, if you are a fan of the FANTASTIC FOUR, to get all those back issues, you have to go back 20 years or so. If you like NEXUS, you don't have to go back too far — although there are still some hard to get issues there, too. Most of the new stuff — GRIMJACK, DNAGENTS, or whatever — there are only so many issues that are there to buy.

I think that for the industry to move forward we have to diversify the material. Most of the material is in the super-hero/fantasy *genre*. Not that I don't like that — I do — but I'd like to see other stuff, too. I think the problem is, as I said, they're selling more and more to the same people, and those people are basically super-hero/fantasy fans, and in order to sell more diverse material you have to attract a more diverse audience, and I don't know if those sort of people are going to frequent the comics shop to see the material when it appears.

I think that's one reason why, when something different appears, it usually has a pretty hard time establishing itself. The people who would like that sort of comic do not know it exists. An example might be ELFQUEST — which, of course, has been successful — but a lot of times you see comments from people who don't read comics and they somehow find a copy of ELFQUEST through a friend or something like that, and say, "Gosh, this is really great stuff! I really like this! I want more of this!" But it is more or less happenstance that they are finding that now. If comics were more widely available, to a wider audience, you might see more of a chance of developing that market. I don't know what the solution to that is, because it's kinda hard for a retailer or a publisher to go into an entirely new area of exposure for the products.

For instance, the comics that I know of


Southern Knights
DATA FILES
Name: Kristin Austin.
Age: 22.
Alias: None.
Height: 5'2".
A mutant endowed with incredible strength, the extent of which is not yet known, and seemingly impervious skin. She is known to have lifted Dragon, a fellow Southern Knight, who weighs several tons.

for all comics-related purposes."

around the country and so on, are mostly not located in prime retail space. You don't see comics shops in a mall. Go down to Eaton's Center or wherever and you don't see a comics shop in there where people could casually drop in to kill some time and find a great new world of comics. So, to me, that is the essential dilemma of the industry. To diversify product-wise and market-wise are sort of tied together, and if that problem could ever be solved you might see some good stuff.

GARY: *You've mentioned that you've written to WARRIOR and that, in mainland Europe, comics are more appreciated, even though they are a North American art form — one of two that are strictly North American, the other being, of course, blues music. Your feelings on European and Japanese comics?*

T. M.: I think British comics are far closer to American comics than European comics. Although there are some differences from American comics: the soccer story sort of thing and the weekly publication frequency that I believe is still the norm over there, and so on. I don't have too much familiarity with British comics, unless they distribute in North America

As far as Japanese comics go, I really don't have too much experience in that, although I read a couple of volumes of the GEN OF HIROSHIMA series, which I thought was an excellent fictionalized personal memoir of a person who experienced the bombing himself as a child. Because of the language barrier I really haven't done anything with that, although I'd like to. I realize the problem with the Japanese is that you'd have to translate the words and change the art while reading it.

I'd love to see more of that stuff, because I think they use different ways of looking at things, different symbols, than we do. The art is a lot different. The art style is a lot different. If somebody out there wants to make some money, I think they could publish some good Japanese comics with English translations. Maybe they already do and I don't know about it.

GARY: *What about European comics?*

T. M.: As far as Europe goes, I've read some of the albums. I'm trying to think of the ones now — there is certainly ASTERIX — I like that very much — and LUCKY LUKE, TINTIN, VALGRIAN VAGABOND OF LIMBO, probably a few others that I'm forgetting at the moment, but mostly the Dargaud albums that have seen distribution over here in English translation. Of course, it's a funny thing with those, in that I think most of them are translated with the British market in mind. So you have a double cultural gap — it's like reading a British translation of a French comic and they're saying "By Jove," and talking about football when it's really soccer, and so on. But I've enjoyed all the ones that I've mentioned and other ones that are escaping my notice at the moment. I realize I've just named the cream of the crop there, and they've got their own stuff that isn't too impressive. Well, for instance, HEAVY METAL. I don't read HEAVY METAL anymore. I have read several issues in the past, and besides the fact that I often find it too vulgar for my taste, the basic problem is that — maybe this is the standard criticism — a lot of it is nicely rendered art with very little story behind it. Although each issue had *some* good stuff in it, I found, all in all, it wasn't worth my outlay of funds.

GARY: *Tell me about some of the ills in comicdom and what you think might be the solutions. . .*

T. M.: Well, gosh. Y'know, anything I say on what's bad would tend to sound like I've set myself up as some arbiter of good taste or quality, and heaven knows I don't have that ability.

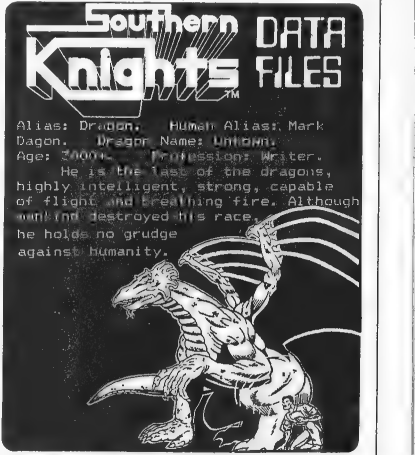
Actually, in some ways, I'm not able to comment on what is bad. Due to the fact that I don't have unlimited funds, and I don't have unlimited time, and the sheer amount of stuff coming out now — if I don't like a title I tend to drop it. So, in some ways, I really don't know what I don't like — because I'm not reading it.

Beyond that one area I think is wrong with comics — focusing on the narrow market — the only thing I worry about is the sheer price. Yeah, it's very nice to get comics that are wonderfully produced. But NEXUS, which is one of my favorites, costs $2.25 to get in Canada!

GARY: *Plus tax.*

T. M.: It comes to $2.41 — and I'm willing to pay that for NEXUS. But an average run-of-the-mill comic that I might be willing to pay 95¢ for, I wouldn't pay $2.25 for — no matter how fine the production is. I like DC's format that uses an acceptable grade of paper and there's still a reasonable price. However, having said that, we were just talking about European comics and they have good production values and so on.

Some lines, particularly the independents, that completely go for the upscale format and price might be doing themselves out of an audience. The assumption seems to be, "Hey, kids can't afford expensive comics, but we're not selling to kids." Well, not all


Southern Knights
DATA FILES
Alias: Dragon. Human Alias: Mark Dagon. Dragon Name: Unknown.
Age: 2000+ Profession: Writer.
He is the last of the dragons, highly intelligent, strong, capable of flight and breathing fire. Although man has destroyed his race, he holds no grudge against humanity.

"If I don't like a title I drop it."

adults are rich, either.

GARY: *In a letter earlier this year in COMICS INTERVIEW you said that you had not read VOID INDIGO — that the reviews were enough to scare you off the title. Do you put a lot of faith in reviews?*

T. M.: I try to get the factual content from the reviews. Unless you find a reviewer who is very much like yourself, you are not going to be able to rely on his or her opinion. Mind you, if you get five reviewers and they all hate the book — it might be an indication that it's not very good.

In VOID INDIGO's case **Steve Gerber**, himself, said, "This is a violent series and people who don't like graphic and brutal violence should not bother to pick it up." so I said, "Thanks for the tip. I mean that sincerely, and I don't think I'll spend my money on it." Turns out I couldn't, anyhow, so it's probably a good thing

GARY: *I take it you were trying to obtain it through Toronto comics stores not serviced by Andromeda distribution, which effectively halted importation of the book into the Ontario area?*

T. M.: Actually, maybe where I get my comics, it got sold out somehow. Maybe there were very limited copies — after all, the first thing was the graphic novel and they tend to bring out very limited numbers of those. But it's my understanding that it was seized at Customs, regardless of who the distributor was.

GARY: *One copy of the lot was seized, the rest were sent through. They were available. They're available in my area. You can get the graphic novel and issues one and two. Right now. Today.*

T. M.: One and two were printed in Canada, anyhow. That would beat the import problem. As you probably know, even your corner variety store carries direct-sales material today. They might be scared off on an individual basis, saying, "Hey, if there's some controversy on this, I'm not in the comics-selling business primarily, so I don't want to take any chances." Maybe that was a factor. Or maybe they brought in a few copies and they sold out before I got them. Like I say, I don't think I ever saw VOID INDIGO on the stands. In fact, I did not see it on the stands, but I did not look real hard for it.

GARY: *No big loss for you, in this particular case.*

T. M.: Was it or wasn't it? I don't want to write it off entirely. As I said in the letter to COMICS INTERVIEW, I've enjoyed a lot of **Steve Gerber's** stuff, but I haven't enjoyed all of it. There's at least a question mark there, for $6.95, or whatever the graphic novel was. I didn't feel like taking the chance.

GARY: *We're getting near the end of the interview and I've got to ask: Do you harbor any secret desire to write books?*

T. M.: You mean comics? No, not really. I guess anybody who's been involved in comics letterhacking might have had a thought in that direction — but, strictly speaking, I don't think I have the talent or the perseverance to make a run at that. So the answer is a pretty definite no.

GARY: *I'm sure there are a lot of people wondering about The Mat Maple. I think you've cleared up a few misconceptions and, hopefully, will spur a few people to emulate your "success" in the letter-writing field.*

T. M.: The only hesitation in doing this was my identity. Quite frankly, I can't figure out why people would expose me. I can understand why people would want to figure out who I am — but I can't understand why people would want to actively pull back the curtain, 'cause that's not what I want. Frankly, it doesn't make any difference to anybody who I really am.

GARY: *What did the guy who climbed Mt. Everest say?*

T. M.: **Sir Edmund Hillary?**

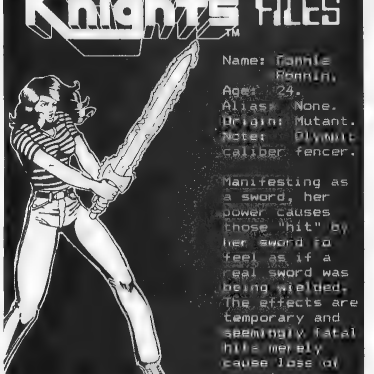
GARY: *"Because it's there."*

T. M.: If I had it to do over again, I would have chosen something like Joe Smith so people wouldn't know it was a pseudonym.

GARY: *What made you start adding an address to your letters?*

T. M.: To tell the truth, the thought never occurred to me until **Richard Bruning** suggested it in a lettercol in one of Capital's mags. I should point out that it is strictly a postal address — I have another address in my "real life." I mulled over Richard's suggestion for a couple of months and then put my name on the postal box waiting list and an opening happened to come up at Weston Station B. Weston is a postal district in the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto. I guess I decided to give out the postal address because I decided it was time for the possibility of two-way communication.

Indeed, now I think that T. M. Maple qualifies as a "real" person for all comics-related purposes. After all, I have an established identity and "personality," and anyone can write to me — just as they could write to me if they knew my real name.



LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

© 1973 William G Wilson

GOOD AS GOLD

Dear Dave,

Fine work, your publication. Of course, I'd like to see a few more interviews with people who aren't located in the New York metropolitan area, but in recent issues (and upcoming issues) you've done a whole lot to improve that picture. I look forward to seeing each issue, and that's not something I can say about too many fan publications

Keep up the good work.

Mike Gold
FIRST COMICS
1014 Davis Street
Evanston, Illinois 60201

Anyone who thinks flattery won't turn a publisher's head probably thinks there are only six critics in the world who disliked SECRET WARS Thanks for the kind comments about COMICS INTERVIEW.

—DAK

SOTI IS HOT (NOT JUST FOR TOTI)

Dear DAK,

I just had to drop you a line and tell you how great issue #19 was. I love **Bolland's** art and when I heard you were doing an interview with him, I rushed out and picked one up. It was worth it. I couldn't get over that cluttered art room he had. You should have asked him about his materials and how in the world he finds anything.

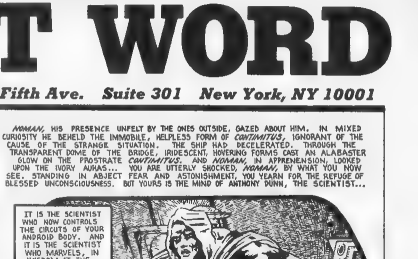
I also liked the interview with **Don & Maggie Thompson**. I have been reading COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE so long I felt that I knew them personally. Especially, now that I read their interview. It was fun to see how they got started in fandom.

The interview of ZOT! and **Scott McCloud** was also great. By great, I mean just plain fun to read. I feel Scott is right about people who don't read ZOT! — having this opinion that it must be only for kids. I picked up the first issue only about four weeks ago at a comic shop and the guy there said something to the effect that it wasn't that great. Well, everyone is entitled to his opinion and from just that issue I say it is good enough for me to do my best to get the other issues soon as I can.

One last item: PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE (is that enough begging?) do an interview with **Dave Stevens** on his brilliant ROCKETEER comic

Keep up the great work. I never thought you could top your **Simonson** interviews, but I was wrong.

Allen Freeman
125 Laralan
Frankfort, KY 40601


AWAKEN HIS PRESENCE UNFELT BY THE ONES OUTSIDE, DAZED ABOUT HIM. IN MIXED CURIOSITY HE BEHELD THE IMMOBILE, HELPLESS FORM OF CONTRAPTUS, IGNORANT OF THE CAUSE OF THE STRANGE SITUATION. THE SHIP HAD DECELERATED. THROUGH THE TRANSPARENT DOME OF THE BRIDGE, IRIDESCENT, HOVERING FORMS CAST AN ALABASTER GLOW ON THE PROSTRATE CONTRAPTUS. AND NONMAN, IN APPREHENSION, LOOKED UPON THE IVORY AURAS... YOU ARE UTTERLY SHOCKED, NONMAN, BY WHAT YOU NOW SEE. STANDING IN ABJECT FEAR AND ASTONISHMENT, YOU YEARN FOR THE REFUGE OF BLESSED UNCONSCIOUSNESS. BUT YOURS IS THE MIND OF ANTHONY DUNN, THE SCIENTIST...
IT IS THE SCIENTIST WHO NOW CONTROLS THE CIRCUITS OF YOUR ANDROID BODY. AND IT IS THE SCIENTIST WHO MARVELS, IN WISDOM AT THE SPECTACLE WHICH CONFRONTS HIM...

Jim Pinkoski's version of NoMan, from COLLECTOR 27.

COLD (AND HOT) BLOODED KILLING

Dear DAK,

Included is a T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS offshoot I'll bet neither you nor very many other persons were aware of, in the fanzine THE COLLECTOR #27. This is a weird and totally unauthorized NoMan strip written and drawn by **Jim Pinkoski**. It's totally off the wall and bears little relation to the Tower series in execution, but it's an interesting item.

If I might, I'd like to comment on **David Singer's** remark that "T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS . . . will kill," and **Dwight Jon Zimmerman's** rejoinder that "What you've just described is murder." Actually, the THUNDER heroes were killing baddies semi-regularly back in their original 1960s series. This didn't seem to bother either the creators or the readers. What this really goes back to is the spy syndrome of the mid-Sixties, ie., the Bond, Flint/Solo cult that gave rise to the idea of the THUNDER Agents. James Bond, Derek Flint, and Napoleon Solo were licensed by their governments to kill as they judged fit in the execution of their duty — though, as was pointed out by **Ian Fleming**, only a very few men, presumably nine,-qualified for the "double-oh" status. In essence, the secret agent was thought akin to a soldier in wartime who, when directed to, will kill the enemy. Many governments, including our own, train and/or employ assassin agents for use in covert operations. Thus Dynamo could squash a subterranean villain under a ceiling he brought down, or NoMan could gun down a killer, or the agents as a whole could cold-bloodedly (or, perhaps, hot-bloodedly) herd the Warlords who murdered Menthor into a laser-beam death-trap and off them all in one fell swoop. James Bond, who did-in Goldfinger, Red Grant, and no telling how many Spectre hired hands, would have done no less.

Or maybe it was put best by **Wally Wood** himself, when he said, "There are good guys and there are bad guys and it's the job of the good guys to kill the bad guys. ``

Anyway, as the THUNDER AGENTS were the subject of one of my very first articles, I was interested in #20 and enjoyed what you got from the workers involved in it. Too bad you can't get one of the original THUNDER people involved and see what he thinks of it.

Or can you?. **Sam Schwartz** of Archie Comics was the editor. Hmmmm. . .

Lou Mougin
1406 Fourth Street
Graham, TX 76046

TODAY'S SUPERHEROES EQUIVALENT OF YESTERDAY'S KID PULP

Dear David,

I regret my delay in thanking you for COMICS INTERVIEW #19.

Inside front cover, if Eclipse lives up to its full-page advertisment, justifies your dedication to the *genre*. From my viewpoint, I might offer a corresponding statement: what began fifty-one years ago as the SPICY magazines has been succeeded by Ballantine's adult fantasy and science fiction of the past few years. And the frightfully prissy (though superbly authentic in other respects) ADVENTURE MAGAZINE of long ago became, circa 1942, so broad minded that

one no longer wrote, "By heaven," instead of "By God." And "damn" was spelled out instead of written "d. . ."

The cartoon, bottom of page 8, dated 1930, could be fitted into one of my space operas, or my next fantasy novel, with the late Roderick David Garvin's son, Felix, speaking the lines — but with the dateline 2112 AD. *The idea is timeless.*

Whether comics or Ballantine paperbacks are an art form has built into it the implied statement that either medium ever was an artform. *Alors*, irrelevant, however amusing. Not mentioning names, but one or more of my long ago contemporaries harped on being a sincere artist. And he suggested once in a letter published after his death, that **C L Moore** and I were no longer "artists." I do not presume to speak for CLM, but for myself, I say, "Manure." I never pretended to be an artist, sincere or insincere. I did say that I earned groceries and made payments on the rose garlanded white cottage which Wanda and I bought two-and-a-half years afer we started out in full time writing. During our marriage, Wanda never had any away from home employment. My critic never made a living beyond the malnutrition level and never bought groceries for a wife.

The late **Henry S Whitehead**, whose work I admired — he was one of the very few contributors to WEIRD TALES magazine who really could *write* — laughed heartily at this talk about "art"! The first thng I had to do in 1932 was learn to write well enough to get two and a half cents a word, instead of the half to three quarters cents pay on publication which some of my contemporaries were getting. **Robert E Howard**'s then- agent wrote in reply to Robert's father, that rates were awfully low, and quoted examples, true quotes from his records. This was when the SPICEYs were paying me more than a cent and were on their way to a series of increases culminating at two and a half cents.

I am not downgrading your publication. I simply comment on the writer-*artist*. He may be earning five times what I manage to make and if he does, bless him. If he likes to regard himself as an artist, there is nothing unconstitutional about the notion. And, it does have genuine entertainment value.

That superheroes are killing an art form or un-art form, whichever you fancy, is valid:

Howard's CONAN to me is dreary tripe. The author of a very good book, an anthology of essays on **Howard**'s mighty talent, declared that my downgrading mechanized meat-cutting, the **Howard** style, as lousy writing was *not* sour grapes — since, of the entire field, I alone had, in my Pawang Ali series, 1934, come nearest to **Howard**'s magic. I wrote the editor, "Thank you, but horseshit." My Pawang Ali feature alternated with the late **Cleve Adams**' Violete McDade crime novelettes on the cover of CLUES DETECTIVE. Whenever Pawang Ali was featured circulation dropped by 15,000 copies; when Violet McDade got the cover, circulation jumped by that amount. So Pawang Ali was bounced, and I profitted. I learned to write better and, in due course, began to get three times the rates **Howard** got. If he had lived long enough, he might have learned to write better stuff, and perhaps to cash in on the millions which CONAN earned for **Howard's** heirs.

A lesbian reproved me for not having Mei Ling, heroine of my T'ang Dynasty novel, DEVIL WIVES OF LI FONG, resort to "sword woman" tactics, instead of female wiles and wit and cunning and character. I replied, "Your example of actual historical cases of sword women are matched by authentic cases of male meat cutters." I offered Mei Ling as a woman being a woman. I was *not* inclined to make her a female imitation of Conan. No more than I made Doc Brandon and Rod Garvin imitation Conans. They were more than mere meat cutters. Julius Caesar and his Legions clobbered the hell out of the brawny barbarians.

You present a lot of good journalism. I mean, controversial articles. I am glad you are making your project profitable. Congratulations.

E. Hoffmann Price
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Above and below: Panels from SHATTER -- controversial computer art by Mike Saenz.

CANADIAN CUSTOMS: OBSCENE

Dear Dave,

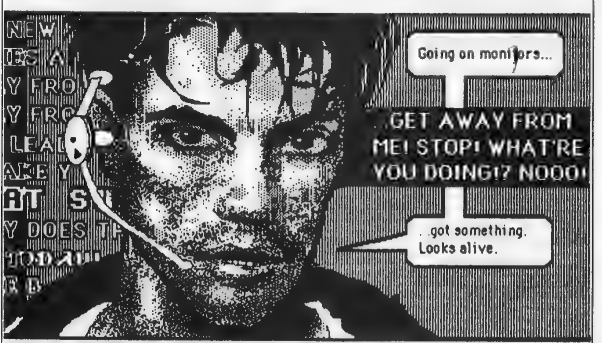
Your "all-computer" issue #21 was indeed an intriguing look at the cutting edge of comics technology. The two computer-related pieces, with **Mike Saenz** and **Jon King**, gave us a balanced look at some of the impact that computers are having in the field. You are probably right, David, that many people get too nervous about the growing use of computers and that the computer should be viewed as a useful tool and not as a threatening monster or an end in itself. However, great changes, whether good or bad, involve a lot of struggle and dislocation. The introduction of computers to the world of comics might end up as being beneficial but there will still be a lot of problems along the road, and not a few people will be left stranded on the roadside.

As I read the **Saenz** piece, a thought occurred to me (and Mike himself touched on it at the end), namely that the *ability* to make a lot of changes to the art easily will tend to make it come true. Now, a small change, (or not-so-small change) is perhaps more trouble than it's worth, but if it can be done easily then it probably *will* be done. Editors should love this! (And perfectionistic artists.) So, maybe part of the gain in speed in doing the art will be lost in doing more revisions than is now customary. (Of course, that should also result in a better finished comic!)

The other night, I happened to catch **Bill Willingham** on **David Letterman's** show. Bill was in the audience and took part in a segment entitled "Brush with Stupidity," in which selected audience members related stupid things that they have done in the past. (Bill's took place when he was a military policeman in Germany and tried to arrest some Boy Scouts.) Bill was wearing a T-shirt with a Batman insignia on it and identified himself as writing and drawing comics when David asked him what he did for a living.

No one seemed to recognize Bill and no one (especially David) seemed impressed when he said he was involved with comics. I think this is a good reminder of the fact that the world of comics is small potatoes as far as the "outside world" is concerned. I mean, you could have **Jack Kirby, Stan Lee, John Byrne, George Perez, Marv Wolfman, and Chris Claremont** up there and most people wouldn't know who the heck they were -- and wouldn't be impressed when they were told, either! The thing is, I don't know if this is altogether a bad thing. I guess everyone would like wider acceptance for comics, but such a process might destroy some of the field's peculiar charms. Or is that sour grapes?

Since I've sort of become CI's Canadian obscenity expert (gosh, that sounds kind of repulsive, doesn't it?), I thought I'd bring you up to date on the matter. Soon after the VOID INDIGO mess, the courts struck down Canada Customs' power to restrict the import of obscene materials for *private* use (ie. not for resale) as arbitrary, vague, and thus unconstitutional. However, within one month, Parliament had quickly passed an amendment to the law to meet the court's objections and thus Canada Customs is back in business -- though the new regulations have yet to be tested in court themselves.



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Also, the Frazer Royal Commission on Prostitution and Pornography was recently completed. Basically, it recommends very heavy criminal penalties for the production, sale, or possession of child pornography. Otherwise, the definition of obscenity that it suggests seems rather more specific than the current one and would include less material, though the penalties would be more severe than they are now. Comics would seem to be relatively safe under the new guidelines. (A Royal Commission is appointed under no obligation to implement. However, the Frazer Commission has gotten good reaction as an effective document, so many of its aspects may become law.) In all of the above, comics were notmentioned once, as far as I know. So maybe we're safe after ill!

T.M. Maple
Box 1272 - Station B
Weston, Ontario
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LOS BROTHERS ON LOS SISTERS

Dear Mr. Kraft:

Thanks for the interview with **Don and Maggie Thompson**. We subscribe to CBG and like their sensible and fun approach to comics. It's nice to know some of the background of those two people we met only once.

The first COMICS INTERVIEW we ever bought was issue #8, with **Mike Baron** talking about BADGER and NEXUS. It would be nice if you could catch up with him again and talk about what's happened to ATARI FORCE, and plans for Horatio and Norbert. We'd also like to hear from **Steve Rude**.

How about talking to various people about women in comics —the characters, that is. We recently read an interesting article; in the COMICS COLLECTOR, hearing what the creators thought were their roles or what men thought were women's roles as writers and artists, but what about hearing from the **Hernandez Brothers** about the incredibly real, well-thought-out women in LOVE & ROCKETS?

Anyway, we're enjoying COMICS INTERVIEW, so keep it up!

Monica Sharp & Dave Garcia
P.O. Box 95
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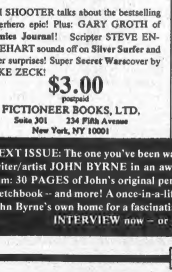

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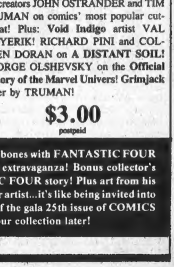

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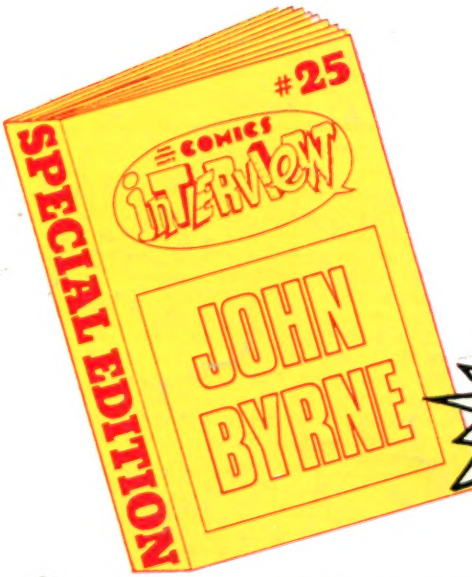

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